NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES • EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
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SPIRITS OF APPALACHIA

CELEBRATING TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF GRATITUDE FOR THIS PLACE WE CALL HOME

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

School spirit is universal. Whether on the court or in the classroom, schools reinforce the sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves.

NOW & THEN

Above left: Fans cheering during a ***2007*** ETSU basketball game in the Memorial Center.
Above right: Fans cheering during a ***1955*** ETSU basketball game in Brooks Gym.

On the cover: Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

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Editor Fred Sauceman
Managing Editor Randy Sanders
Poetry & Book Editor Marianne Worthington
Music Editor Wayne Winkler
Film Editor Brad Lifford
Photo Editor Charlie Warden
Center Director Roberta Herrin

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Center for Appalachian Studies & Services
ETSU Box 70556
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UPCOMING DEADLINES
Appalachian High
By March 31, 2010

Getting Around
By August 31, 2010

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THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

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THE SPIRIT OF HUMANITY IN APPALACHIA

ROBERTA HERRIN
DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES

My family homeplace sits at the end of a dead-end road, in a bowl hollowed out of the mountains by some ancient force of nature. Visitors comment that they sense a presence on these acres. A few years ago, I invited colleagues for a workshop-retreat at the farm. An hour into the work session, Pauline quietly left the table to wander through the pasture and down the road. She said she had been "called away" from our mundane business to experience something larger, which she felt the minute she crossed the bridge and came into view of the house and field. One family friend senses spirits on the property—eyes that look out from the laurels along the creek bank. They watch and protect, she says.

Last year I met a man who has the "gift of sight." Like Sharyn McCrumb's character Nora Bonesteel, he "knows things." So I asked him, "What is it that people sense? What is this presence that called Pauline away from the work of the day? What are the spirits or watchers?" He said that people are picking up on the ancient energy of the mountains mixed with the accumulated spirit of all who have lived on the land. Energy and spirit emanate from eons of vegetative growth and rocks and water and pioneers and farmers and Native Americans—especially Native Americans, he said.

Perhaps this phenomenon—energy of the mountains mixed with centuries of human spirit—explains the universal attraction of mountains—not just the Appalachian mountains. Greg Mortenson captured it in *Three Cups of Tea*. Horace Kephart found it and documented it in *Our Southern Highlanders*.

It is tempting to think of mountain-energy-spirit as something extraordinary and otherworldly. The very word "spirit" connotes transcendence of the here-and-now. Phrases such as "pioneering spirit," "spirit of discovery," and "spirit of independence" describe the quality in human beings that lifts them beyond the ordinary. Even the word "moonshine" conveys a sense of lunar mystery. I would argue, however, that in Appalachia these are quite ordinary aspects of the culture, ordinary in the sense that they are hallmarks.

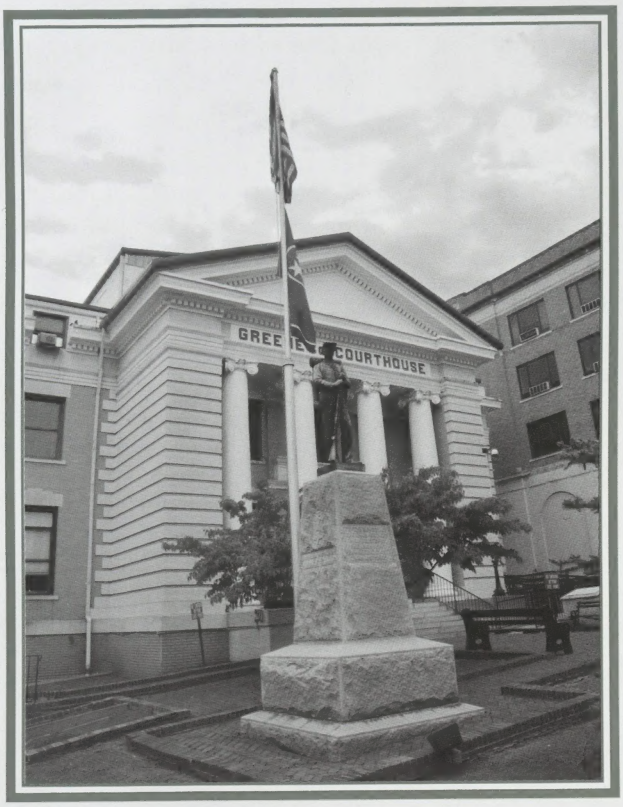
Over the past twenty-five years, *Now & Then* magazine has featured hundreds of essays and stories and poems about culture. But it is, ironically, the English poet and critic Matthew Arnold whose definition sits most comfortably with me. In the 1873 Preface to *Literature and Dogma*, he writes that culture is "the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit."

When visitors to my homeplace sense watchers or spirits or presences, they are witnessing culture, the accumulated spirit and energy of the past, the highest remnants of humanity. It is not otherworldly. It is immediate and sensible to us, if we can be still and quiet in its presence. The Appalachian spirit is as old as the mountains and is reborn in every human being who is willing to become acquainted with it. ❖

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

FRED SAUCEMAN

REMEMBERING AN APPALACHIAN SPIRIT: MISS ELSIE GASS



Her name was Elsie Gass, and she died about thirty years ago. Most folks called her "Miss Elsie," and, to people in need around Greeneville, Tennessee, she was our Mother Teresa, our angel of mercy.

I grew up in Greeneville, steeped in history and surrounded by fascinating and colorful people. Downtown, for example, there was Hoghead Williams. Hoghead hung out at the courthouse. He was an early predictor of the popularity of shows like "The People's Court" and networks like Court TV. He'd sit through cases from beginning to end, providing a voluble, running commentary on the testimony, much to the chagrin of the town's attorneys.

Another one of my community's most colorful personalities spent her time more wisely. She didn't lounge in the courtroom or lean on parking meters like Hoghead. She helped others. Thousands of them. We'll never know how many.

Her physical qualities were the very antithesis of what you'd commonly think of when describing a hero. She weighed less than a hundred pounds. She was so stooped she was almost a hunchback. She wore inexpensive horn-rim glasses, and her face was slightly misshapen, almost devoid of a chin. She rarely spoke. The only two words I suppose I ever heard her say were "thank you." But a hero she was, to thousands.

In 1956, the Town of Greeneville gave Miss Elsie Gass a car. It was a green and white Ford, the colors of Greeneville High School. Miss Elsie was so tiny she had to sit on a stack of books just to see through the oversized, 1950s-style steering wheel. She never drove over thirty miles an hour, and you could barely see the top of her head.

Geographically, Greene County is the largest county in the state. But Miss Elsie kept up with its needs. She knew the people who were struggling to pay their light bills. She knew the families without coats for the winter. She knew about skipped meals to feed the children.

Miss Elsie struggled, too, but she never let anybody know it. She'd once thought about being a nurse, but she couldn't afford the schooling. Still, she wore white all her life. How she supported herself, I cannot imagine. She had no regular income, no retirement plan, no 401K. No one provided her insurance. No one paid her a salary. She never married.

She occupied a small, subterranean office downtown, between the First National Bank and the Greene County Courthouse. You'd walk in there sometimes, knowing she was open, but you couldn't see her. She was hidden among stacks of clothing, blankets,

Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

coats. Cast-off items she'd collected from people who no longer needed them.

Armful by armful, she'd load those discarded things, some ragged, some still in original packaging, into that 1956 Ford and chug through the county, stopping at the most dire, forlorn doorsteps with what, to the inhabitants, seemed like gifts from God. And I suppose they were.

At Thanksgiving and Christmastime, she'd assemble baskets of food and, while most people were warm at home, celebrating with family and friends, she'd be out in all manner of weather, on muddy and icy roads, delivering sustenance and spreading quiet joy. She brought a basket to my great aunt Effie one time, when she was down on her luck.

My mother says when you had something to get rid of, you first thought of Miss Elsie, a one-person Goodwill center.

She'd parallel-park that Ford as near as she could to the Capitol Theater on Main Street and set up her dime board on the sidewalk. It was a long, wooden plank with sides to keep the coins from dropping off. She'd sit silently and watch as moviegoers and downtown shoppers flipped dimes onto that board. That's largely how she paid for those turkeys and hams and the fruits and nuts she'd distribute during the holiday time.

She wanted no publicity, no credit, no headlines. Only a handful of pictures of her exist. She never wanted to be photographed.

Miss Elsie uplifted the downtrodden. Honored the forgotten. Comforted the abandoned. She visited jails and prisons, pleading with inmates to turn to the Lord.

She wrote a newspaper column for *The Greeneville Sun*. It was entitled "Inasmuch," the word taken from Jesus' message to his disciples in the Book of Matthew: "Inasmuch as you have done it for the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me."

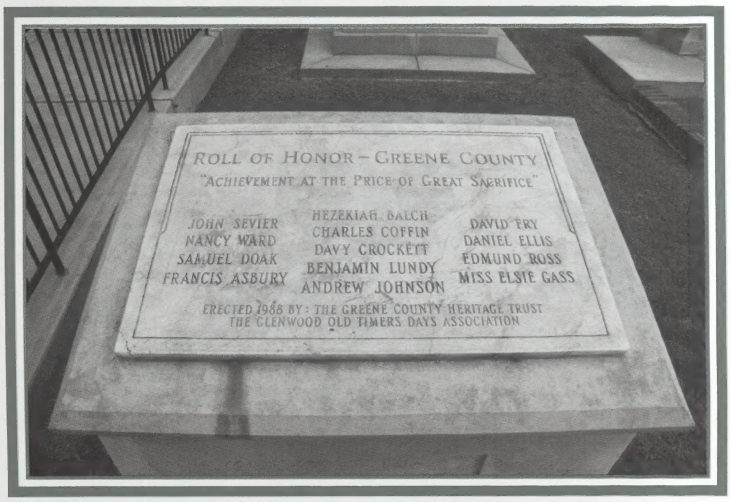
That passage guided her life. In 1924, she began running the Elsie Gass Mission, a tiny wooden church on Leonard Street, a sad, decaying, and dangerous section of town, but a spot where she felt she could do the most good. On her sweater, she wore a metal button with an uplifted index finger and the phrase "One Way."

She kept the doors of that little church open and the deliveries of necessities to the needy going until 1976, when she "retired" around the age of ninety-four. But she continued to work as long as she could.

She died on Christmas Day 1980. By best accounts, she was ninety-eight.

In 1983, in preparation for the county's bicentennial celebration, *The Greeneville Sun* asked its readers and several prominent people to list citizens who had made the greatest contributions to the life of the community. Choices included a Harvard-educated lawyer, a doctor, two newspaper publishers, the owner of two radio stations, a judge, a tobacco baron, a state legislator, a dentist-turned-realtor, a teacher, and an industrialist. In the bicentennial publication, their photographs are all slick studio portraits. But there, among the illustrious and the affluent, is a simple, amateur snapshot of Miss Elsie, holding her Bible.

In a letter she once wrote to the newspaper, Miss Elsie, a lady of few words and many deeds, said, "I love people always."



On the lawn of the Greene County Courthouse, among memorials to martial valor, is a stone engraved with the words *Roll of Honor—Greene County*. Chiseled into the rock are the names of Davy Crockett, President Andrew Johnson, Governor John Sevier, Samuel Doak, the founder of Tusculum College, and others whose stories have been told in Tennessee history books for generations. An inscription reads: *Achievement at the Price of Great Sacrifice*. Among the heralded heroes, the very last name is that of Miss Elsie Gass. Hers is an Appalachian spirit undeniable and everlasting. ❖

Fred Sauceman, a native of Greeneville, Tennessee, is the editor of *Now & Then*.

Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

MOTHMAN

MARGARET M. NAVA

A neighbor of mine in Spencer, West Virginia, J.B., took great pleasure in telling tales that set people's skin crawling and turned their blood to ice. No one ever knew if his stories were true or not. Somehow, it didn't matter. All they knew was that the stories spooked them—me included. In fact, one in particular was so terrifying I locked my doors and hid under the covers for nearly a week after hearing it.

The way J.B. told it, back in the 1960s, a lot of good, honest, church-type people out in Point Pleasant started seeing and hearing things they couldn't explain. Things like weird lightning flashes that lit up the sky and terrifying noises that sounded like screaming banshees. Local newspapers joked about UFOs and alien invasions. Several even implied that some of the townspeople were hallucinating.

Over the course of a few months, a number of worrisome events took place. Kids at a local lovers' lane were chased by what they identified as a howling monster. An old Indian chief's grave was dug up. Hunting dogs wouldn't hunt. Cows and horses were found disemboweled along the sides of roads. Most had their blood sucked dry. TVs turned on and off by themselves, and telephones rang but went to static when answered. A Red Cross Bloodmobile filled with fresh blood was pursued down a darkened highway by an unidentifiable flying object.

The only thing these incidents had in common was that all the witnesses reported seeing an eight-foot-tall, bird-like creature. They said the creature walked like a man and had large, red, mesmerizing eyes and a twelve-foot wingspan. Whenever the creature was spotted, it levitated off the ground and flew away without

Mothman statue in downtown Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Photo courtesy Kevin Myers.

ever flapping its wings. Sometimes it followed people. Other times, it just hovered overhead and inspected the humans below. Since it only came out at night, people started calling it the Mothman.

J.B. said a reporter from one of the local newspapers did some research and found out that most of the strange lights and noises people were reporting originated from an abandoned World War II TNT factory out on the Ohio River near Point Pleasant. Because of the plant's remote location, it was an excellent hideout for anyone, or anything, not wanting to be discovered.

They said the creature walked like a man and had large, red, mesmerizing eyes and a twelve-foot wingspan.

When the reporter went out to check the area, he made some disturbing discoveries. Wild plants like ramps and molly moochers (morel mushrooms) had grown to enormous size. Yellow goldfinches had developed eagle-sized talons. Terrapins had become aggressive. The reporter hypothesized that the creature might have been some sort of mutant created by a gone-wrong chemical experiment that had shut down the munitions plant.

No one believed him, of course, except for a female reporter who not only followed everything he reported but also claimed that Mothman walked into her office one night while she was working late. Unlike all the other witnesses, however, she described the creature as being very short with strange, almost hypnotic eyes covered with thick glasses. His hair was long and tangled, and he spoke in a low, halting voice. When he noticed a pen on the woman's desk, he picked it up, rolled it around in his claw-like fingers, then bolted out the door.

That's where J.B.'s story ended, but it wasn't the last I'd hear about the red-eyed monster.

During the fall of 1967, West Virginia experienced an abnormal amount of rain. Roads were washed out, trees uprooted, houses destroyed. There had been so much flooding that the Department of Transportation sent crews out to inspect all the bridges for safety. A few were shut down, but the one over the Ohio River in Point Pleasant passed with flying colors.

On December 15, as people were hurrying home from work and Christmas shopping, signal lights on the Ohio side of the bridge malfunctioned. Traffic backed up on both sides, and drivers started honking their horns and yelling. Suddenly there was a blinding flash and loud popping noise as one of the overhead suspension cables broke loose, followed by two more. Nuts, bolts, and flying cable shattered windshields and smashed car roofs. Without the support of the cables, the bridge started swaying and twisting. Within seconds, a large section broke off. Thirty-one cars went into the river. Forty-six people died.

All the newspapers and TV stations claimed the disaster had been caused by "undetected structural damage due to recent rain," but several of the survivors insisted it was the Mothman. They had seen him, they said, hovering above the bridge just before the first cable tore loose. One man even said he saw the creature flying toward the TNT plant. Search parties tried to track Mothman down, but no trace was ever found.

J.B said Mothman was an abomination who dwelled at the TNT plant and came out at night so he could seek revenge on the world that created him. He said the creature went into hiding after the bridge incident but that he's still around, just waiting for another chance or another victim.

Reporters and other knowledgeable people claim the creature was some sort of poltergeist or maybe even a sandhill crane run amok. I'm not sure what I believe. ❖

Margaret M. Nava, a retired West Virginia goat farmer, now lives and writes in New Mexico.

ABUZZ WITH MISCHIEVOUS SPIRITS

AMANDA RIGELL

On the Saturday when I sat down to talk with Dwayne Ward, co-owner of the Bee Hive Antique Mall in Elizabethton, Tennessee, the light outside dimmed as a late summer shower fell. We sat in the downstairs parlor, surrounded by gorgeous old chairs, dishes, knick-knacks, and what-nots. The waxing and waning of the light outside echoed the chills and thrills of Ward's tales of the Hive, rumored—and some say proven—to be a dwelling for spirits and shadow people.

The Bee Hive, housed in the building that was once the old Franklin Hospital, is a two-story brick structure built in the 1940s. Its surgical rooms now hold reams of beautiful vintage fabrics, AM radios, and faded portraits, but according to those who believe, there are spirits who take up residence in the old rooms as well.

Among the believers are the members of the Tri-Cities Paranormal Research Society, whose conclusion is that the antique mall has "a significant amount of paranormal activity." The investigation team has posted video and audio clips on its website, which catalogs paranormal investigations throughout the region, from Johnson City, Tennessee, to Abingdon, Virginia, and as far away as Louisville, Kentucky. The site is also home to an exhaustive list of tips and tricks for paranormal investigations, such as capturing EVPs, or electronic voice phenomena—the voices of spirits caught on tape.

I asked Ward about the first incident that led the owners to believe they may have unearthed more than old plaster and brick with their extensive renovation prior to the opening of the Bee Hive in 2008. "There was a set of Dutch screen doors designed to swing open; I'd never seen any like them. And we tried every which way to get them open," Ward said. "Wouldn't budge." After taking a break from the effort, the owners returned to the store later to find one of the doors thrown free of its hinges, the other hanging loosely.

As a vendor worked in her booth after hours, she heard a knock coming from a cabinet nearby. "Knocking like someone was in there and wanted out," says Ward. "She thought it might have been a mouse, but when she walked over and opened the cabinet, it was empty." As the story goes, the vendor said, "Leave me alone. You're frightening me." And the knocking, Ward says with a hint of a grin, stopped.

As Ward shared tales of the Bee Hive's otherworldly tenants, I was by turns moved to smile, shake my head, and shudder. The room adjacent to the parlor is the purported site of a doctor's suicide. The paranormal squad investigated it after one team member

The Bee Hive Antique Mall, Elizabethton, Tennessee. Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

reported having an unusual feeling while standing there. I decided to do the same and asked about the findings upstairs.

"That's a hotspot," Ward said. The upstairs rooms, filled with fabric, have been the sites of several paranormal events. Ward recounts the paranormal investigative team's first visit, when one lead investigator, Neysa, saw two shadows—one large, one small—opposite one another in two upstairs doorways. Sensing hostility, she told the larger one, "Don't hurt that little one; leave it alone." Both shadows disappeared, and as Neysa walked away from the doorways, she felt a tug at her hem, like that of a small child taking hold to follow her downstairs.

"It's amazing how many people have the power to sense these things," Ward tells me in the parlor. "There are 'mediums,' and there are 'sensitives'—sensitive to that kind of energy." According to paranormal experts, he explains, apparitions are "just energy, but they are in another dimension, running alongside ours. Sometimes they can cross over, but we can't; they can see us, but we can't see them." He attributes this power of sensing the paranormal to another visitor to the store, a thirteen-year-old customer. Upon entering the store, Ward says, she asked, "Do you have ghosts here?" The teenager posited a scenario almost identical to that of the paranormal investigation team: an oppressive spirit upstairs in one of the surgery rooms.

I wondered aloud what kind of impact the ghost tales about the Bee Hive have on customers. Ward says some are afraid and say they want no part of it, and others light up at the thought, saying, "Oooh, you got ghosts here? Where are they?"

As part of the latter crowd, I thanked Ward for speaking with me and headed upstairs to check out some fabric for a Roman shade. The stairs creaked and groaned under my feet on my way to the second floor. By the time I had walked halfway around the second story, a square hallway opening to small rooms on either side, I was certain I heard footsteps. I tried to keep Ward's advice in mind. "Spirits just have to be told their boundaries," he said. "These are playful. They haven't done anything to hurt anyone." By the time I reached the far side of the hallway, I realized the footsteps were only a curtain, rustled by a window fan.

I continued through the upper rooms, feeling the edges of quilts and eyeing old linen baby gowns with a new awareness. "Antiques can carry spirits," Ward said, "especially personal things, and particularly linens, because people put so much of themselves into crafting them." As I wandered to the booth in the building's southeast corner, my eyes lit on an old Dale Earnhardt, Sr. commemorative clock. It seemed he was staring straight at me, ready to speak, but he had no messages for me that rainy Saturday.

Returning downstairs, I had one last room to visit—the doctor's office beside the parlor. I walked into the room expecting a ghostly revelation like the paranormal squad had received: When the investigator said, "We heard a doctor killed himself in this room," a voice reportedly answered, "I did." But after several hopeful minutes, the room yielded no secrets, and I continued to the storefront unenlightened.

Though I was disappointed to realize that it was time to leave and I hadn't yet seen a shadow figure, orb, or apparition, I was buoyed by my surroundings—a wealth of the lovely trappings of earthly life that the Bee Hive's vendors have tenderly displayed. After saying goodbye at the counter, and as I crossed the street to my car, the Bee Hive's unexplained rattles, knocks, whispers, and shadows gave me pause. If Dwayne Ward is right, and the haunts of the Hive are simply energy, and all we must do is set their boundaries, as he suggests, what power this gives us over the haunting energies of fear and doubt! The next time I'm plagued with either, I'll follow the lead of the intrepid antique vendor. "Leave me alone," I'll say. And the fear knocking around in the dusty cabinets of my heart will disappear.

I can't help but wonder if a few of the Bee Hive's "mischievous spirits" visited me after all, leaving me brightened and blessed with such a realization as I reached my car door with the summer shower now passed and the sun shining. ❖

Amanda Rigell, an East Tennessee native, is a teacher, writer, and musician living in Johnson City.

DASEIN

ADAM PACTON

A laugh or glance or tilt-of-head
Would be easier than this, easier
Than the space between my
Fingers and your sleeping back—
An abyss looking back still—
Easier than the quiet
Surrender of time and the
Irrelevance of indecision.

Ghosts are not shadows of
What has been, they are not
The unshriven memories of
People or place;
They are born and live in the
Vacuum of our mouths;
They are the stillborn words
That lie dead on our tongues
And leave us choking on the
Dust of possible histories.

Adam Pacton is an English instructor and writer. He lives in Johnson City, Tennessee.

THE GHOSTS OF LEES-MCRAE

MICHAEL JOSLIN

I've taught at Lees-McRae College in the village of Banner Elk, North Carolina, under the steep slopes of Beech Mountain for more than twenty years. During that time thousands of students and dozens of administrators, faculty, and staff have come and gone. Yet some souls have kept their place on campus—the ghosts of Lees-McRae. They were here in weathered stone buildings almost a century old before I arrived and will probably be here when I pass on.

Two places are favorite haunts of the specters that stubbornly maintain their place as generations come and go. Students, faculty, and staff have regularly met with phantom visitors and unusual occurrences in Tate Residence Hall and Carson Library for many years.

Tate is a natural place for eerie presences. The large stone building sits on a shelf of land above a field facing Beech Mountain. The rectangular structure began as a hospital in the 1930s, serving mountain folks from Avery, Watauga, and Mitchell counties in North Carolina and from Carter County, Tennessee. In the natural course of things, many babies took their first breaths inside these rock walls, and many people of all ages breathed their last here.

In the 1960s Lees-McRae took over the building when the hospital moved into another, larger, more modern structure. While the institution departed, some of the spirits remained loyal to the place where they died. They shifted allegiance from the hospital to the college.

Over the decades, many students have had encounters with these phantoms from the past. Allison Norris, who began as a student in Tate, then became director of residence life, and today is dean of students, has much experience with the ghosts, especially with Emily, a young woman who died in the hospital. Allison has seen eerie illumination flickering around the building when it was emptied for vacation, including a time she saw the lights go on sequentially in each room on the top floor, flashing faster and faster around the building. Another time she and her husband experienced one of Emily's paranormal tricks.

"A few years ago they were replacing the plumbing in the building, so we moved out. We went back to paint our apartment. I finished painting, and then I went upstairs with my husband to check on things. We walked into a room on the second floor. Then we went up to the third floor. When we went upstairs, we

Tate Residence Hall, a favorite haunt of Lees-McRae College ghosts. Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

walked out of the stairwell onto what should have been the third floor. We were back on the second floor.

"We looked at each other and just ran out of there. It was freaky. There is no way you can mistake the floors."

Then there was the time Allison helped a student, Misty Arpin, pack all her clothes and possessions to go home. They left the room, locking the door. When Misty returned, all her clothes and things were unpacked and replaced in the drawers and closets.

Strange noises, windows sliding up and down, mirrors flying off walls, clothes shifting, lights blinking, and other ghostly phenomena are common, continuing occurrences in Tate, even though Emily and her friends mainly haunt the library, which is where I made her acquaintance.

My favorite place on campus is the Stirling Collection, where Carson Library houses its Appalachian books and materials in a locked room. Spirits are also partial to the quiet, book-filled retreat on the second floor. One day as I leafed through a volume, I noticed a woman in an ankle-length, dark dress looking at me from the end of the stack. I glanced down, then looked up, asking if I could help her. She was gone. As I was leaving, I asked the ladies in the office who she was. They said I was the only one who had been in the room.

Edward Moser, a longtime maintenance worker on campus, has a story to tell, too. One morning he entered the library to work on some lights. He unlocked the doors around eight-thirty and went in. At the end of a stack, he saw a woman "dressed in an older way" and a little girl. He glanced up, said "Good morning," then walked to the circuit breaker box to shut off the

electricity. Suddenly he stopped and thought, "What are they doing in here? I unlocked the doors!" Chills surged through his body. He hurried back, looked all around, but saw no one.

Security guards also deal with the library spirit. Former guard Dallas Gragg several times had to climb stairs to the second story to turn off lights he had already turned off. One night after three trips up the stairs, he yelled, "Come on, Emily; I'm worn out." The lights blinked out and stayed out that night.

The Lees-McRae ghosts have compassion, a sense of humor, and staying power. The comfortable campus has become their home. ❖

Michael Joslin is a professor at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina.

Interior shot of the Carson Library's Stirling Collection. Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

A WARNING

THOMAS BURTON

From

BEECH MOUNTAIN MAN: THE MEMOIRS OF RONDA LEE HICKS

(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009). Reprinted with permission.

Ted Hicks, son of the internationally-known storyteller Ray Hicks, tells of his mother Rosa's being forewarned supernaturally of the killing of her sister Viola. Stanley Ward, Viola's husband, borrowed a shotgun from his wife's father, ostensibly to kill a rabbit just outside the house. Stanley then went out the door, turned back into the house, and shot Viola, who was sitting by her mother.

According to Ted, Stanley meant to kill both—"Said he figured the gun would scatter more than that." Viola's father and another man were going to hunt Stanley down and shoot him, but Stanley went straight to give himself up, possibly to avoid being shot by some of the family.

Ted adds to this horrific story the engaging details of the forewarning Rosa had of her sister's death: "Mama heard the warnin' in the window, like hearin' music pingin' in the window. Mama had heard that, that day, the warnin'. They always say you get a warnin' and hear music in the window or somethin' in the house, makin' music like. She said she knowed somethin' was wrong—didn't know what she'd heard, you know." ❖

Thomas G. Burton is professor emeritus of English at East Tennessee State University. He is a recipient of the Appalachian Consortium's Laurel Leaves Award.

Rosa Hicks cooks on her woodstove next to the window where she heard the warning. Photo courtesy Thomas Burton.

THE BOTTLE TREE

JUDY LEE GREEN

My mama was not afraid of haints. She loved little cemeteries and always said she was a whole lot more afraid of the living than the dead. If the truth be told, though, she was afraid of most everything else. Snakes, spiders, bugs, blue-tailed lizards, water, storms, lightning, being alone, and the dark of night all frightened my mama. Though ghouls and ghosts did not frighten her, she did nonetheless erect a bottle tree to ward off evil spirits.

A Georgia sharecropper's daughter, my mama was descended from hardy Appalachian ancestors who settled in Virginia and North Carolina before making their way through the Great Smokies and on into the Blue Ridge Mountains. Born during the Great Depression into a family of storytellers, she was raised on folktales of witches and ghosts and graveyard haints.

At bedtime, when I was a little girl, she often repeated the stories of her childhood to me, my brothers, and my sister. We five little kids begged each night for scary tales of spirits and spooks, of bloody bones, scratch eye, and the booger man. The stories were all the more terrifying because they were always purported to have happened near the graveyard where she was born and raised, to our granddaddy or to someone he knew.

After my carpenter daddy retired from building houses, he and my mama moved from a suburban area where they had lived for more than forty years to an isolated mountaintop in the foothills of Southern Appalachia. They planned to live happily ever after in the country on his Social Security income. They intended to plant a garden and grow their own food. Daddy would go squirrel and rabbit hunting. He would build birdhouses and flower boxes. Mama would tend flowers and raise a few chickens. Their lives would be slower, less hectic. They would live frugally and simply. A good life could surely be had in a rural area.

But living in the country wasn't nearly as much fun as my mama remembered or anticipated it to be. The summer heat was scorching. Giant grasshoppers swarmed and made her jump and scream. Bugs ate the garden. An allergic reaction caused her to break out in a rash all over her body each time she ventured past the clothesline. The chickens roosted on the porch railing and messed all over the porch. And huge mosquitoes, according to my mama, would sting you in the arm, kick you in the butt, then carry off a baby chick.

My mama had forgotten how dark the country could be at night without the streetlights she had grown

Photo courtesy Judy Lee Green.

accustomed to. The sounds of the night world, as well as the darkness, made her nervous and jittery. She walked the floor, unable to sleep when the velvet pall of gloom was drawn over the mountaintop. She was too fearful to close her eyes until daybreak began to leak onto the horizon like pink lemonade under a doorway. She wrote long letters, always complaining that her mind was like a bowl of scrambled eggs. She regretted ever moving to the lonesome, scary, forsaken place she called Booger Mountain.

If she couldn't grow a garden, my mama decided she would erect a bottle tree. Often seen today in less affluent areas of the rural South as yard art, bottle trees rattle in the wind. The bottles tinkle against each other in light breezes. Some people contend that the rattling of the bottle tree keeps away evil spirits that walk around at night. They become trapped inside the bottles like flies. Since they are unable to find their way out, the spirits are prevented from coming inside the house and causing trouble or entering a living person. Others maintain that the glint of sunlight on the bottle tree in daylight hours attracts dead spirits returning to claim their loved ones. The whine of the wind blowing on and in the bottles is said to be the moan of captured spirits.

My daddy cut down a tall scrub piney-wood tree, and from the center he cut out a twelve-foot section that had the most branches from top to bottom. The branches were trimmed to lengths of about twelve inches. Each branch was cleared of all growth. He planted the pine into the ground, making the tree about ten feet tall. He drove large sixty-penny nails into the tree between the branches to accommodate additional bottles.

My mama then placed the mouth of a clean glass jar or bottle over each nail or branch. She used clear pickle and mayonnaise jars, blue Milk of Magnesia, green Coke and 7-Up, brown vinegar, and red cough syrup bottles. Friends contributed dark wine and liquor bottles. The tree bloomed beautifully with kaleidoscopic colors. When the wind blew, the bottles clinked against each other like musical wind chimes.

The bottle tree stood in the front yard, along with gourd birdhouses, twig furniture, blown-out tires, and bald retreads filled with dirt and planted with flowers. Floribunda roses twined on abandoned farm equipment. And a clothesline stretched clear across the front yard, where my daddy's overalls buck-danced on windy days and my mama's sheets waltzed in light breezes.

The mountaintop was quiet, and though my mama never learned to love it, she resigned herself to the fact that she had nowhere else to go. My daddy, however, soon became sick and died of cancer, making a lonesome place even more forlorn.

From the swing on her screened front porch, my mama had a front row seat to a continuing series of country concerts. She could hear the hum of bumblebees, the call of the bobwhite, crickets chirping, katydids singing, and hoot owls hollering. She listened to grasshoppers sawing, cows mooing, and dogs barking.

She shivered when she heard coyotes howling, smiled at the sound of roosters crowing, chickens clucking, frogs croaking, and birds singing. She tensed when the squawking of ducks on the pond meant the threat of a fox. The echo of car tires on the two-lane blacktop, heard but unseen, reminded her that others were going places though she sat alone.

She heard the soft tinkling of the bottle tree that kept evil spirits away from her house. That tree fulfilled the need for an Appalachian woman to add beauty and a little drama to her humble mountaintop shack, which remained to her, forever, a scary place when the sun went down. ❖

Judy Lee Green of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is a winner of the James Still Award for Poetry, the Wilma Dykeman Award for Essay, the Emma Bell Miles Award for Essay, and the Tennessee Mountain Writers Excellence in Writing Award.

Photo courtesy Randy Sanders.

SUPERNATURAL ATHENS:
ONE OF THE "SCARIEST PLACES ON EARTH"

CAITLIN KIGHT

Shadowy caves. Native burial grounds. Collapsed mine shafts. Old, abandoned buildings. These are just some of the many features that make Appalachia the perfect setting for gripping ghost stories. One of the most supernatural sites—or the most famous, anyway—is Athens, Ohio, a cozy college town nestled in the Appalachian foothills in the southeastern part of the state. Depending on whom you talk to, you may hear Athens described as one of the most haunted places in the state, the country, or even the world. Indeed, in the nineteenth century the British Psychical Society purportedly recognized the town as a haunting hotspot, and over 100 years later, in 2001, Athens was featured on FOX Television's "Scariest Places on Earth."

The town's high levels of supernatural activity have often been blamed on what is likely a geometric inevitability: Five of the area's nearly 300 cemeteries can be linked to draw a pentagram, that ubiquitous sign of the occult. There is some argument about which cemeteries form the pentagram, but usually the list includes Simms, Hanning, Cuckler, Higgins, and Zion. This tale is particularly appealing because several of the graveyards have their own interesting stories. Simms Cemetery, for instance, is the final resting place of John Simms, supposedly a local hangman who is reported to have used a (still-standing) tree at that site for many of his executions. Both Simms and his victims are said to roam the surrounding ridges. Hanning Cemetery is reportedly haunted by an old robed man whose appearance is accompanied by bloodcurdling screeches and screams. Several other local cemeteries have similarly disturbing tales, including Haines Cemetery, the final "resting" place of a local Civil War veteran who killed his family, burned down their home, and then committed suicide. His actions were thought to be a result of what is now known as Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, which he apparently is destined to experience for eternity: The veteran has often been seen pacing the cemetery, bringing bad luck to any who spot him.

Some of the most famous cemeteries in the area are those located on the grounds of the former Athens Mental Health Center, now owned by Ohio University and called The Ridges. Most of the gravestones at these sites are labeled simply with patients' ID numbers; combined with their remoteness, this lack of a personal touch adds to the eerie feeling inherent in the graveyards. However, the cemeteries are not known to host any specific ghostly presences. Rather, they contribute to the overall feeling of haunted creepiness associated with the old mental hospital itself. Although most of its buildings are at least partially renovated, the hospital retains the archetypal haunted-mansion-on-the-hill

West State Street Cemetery angel, part of a monument to fallen soldiers. Photo courtesy Fred and Stephanie Kight.

look common to countless horror films. As expected, it has stories to match. The most notorious of these is grounded in unfortunate fact: In the late 1970s a patient named Margaret Schilling disappeared, and her corpse was found several months later in an unused upper floor of the hospital. Apparently the imprint of her body remains in the cement due to some strange chemical process. Her spirit is also said to remain, joining those of several other previous inmates who reportedly fill the buildings with footsteps, knocking and tapping sounds, and various vocalizations.

The Ridges, with all its supernatural baggage, is an appropriate addition to a campus already famous for its many hauntings. Perhaps the best known is the story of Wilson Hall, room 428, where a student is rumored to have mysteriously died in the 1970s (though some sources dispute this fact). Some versions of the tale describe a suicide, others an occult ritual gone wrong. For several years afterward, students assigned to the room reported strange—though ultimately harmless—occurrences, including flying books, opening/closing doors, and even sightings of the student's spirit. Adding fuel to the fire, Wilson Hall reputedly sits at the exact center of the Athens cemetery pentagram and is also reported to have been built on top of an additional mental health center cemetery, and/or an old Native American burial ground. Regardless, Ohio University eventually deemed the room uninhabitable and discontinued its use as a residence.

Another compelling campus ghost story involves the actor Paul Newman, who attended the school until he was kicked out for rowdy behavior. Several years later, he returned to give a speech on campus. On his way to the auditorium, he walked past Brown House (ironically the home of the Contemporary History Institute) and was greeted by its owner, and his friend, Millie Brown. It was not until after his speech that Newman discovered Millie had actually died several years previously. Millie's friendly ghost was also reported to take a visiting child on a tour of the house and has also been seen peering out the windows in order to keep an eye on her beloved town. Perhaps she has seen some of the many other ghosts and poltergeists reported to live throughout Athens, such as the runaway slave named Nicodemus who was killed while hiding in an Underground Railroad stop, the ghostly basketball team whose spirits returned to campus after a devastating bus crash, or one of the Ohio University students whose ghosts linger after an untimely death at school. This latter category includes the spirit of David Tischman, who is said to have used a Ouija board to communicate with his friends while they held a séance—in one of the pentagram cemeteries, of course—several months after his death.

Séances play quite a prominent role in Athens' supernatural history and may be responsible, in part, for the town's widespread ghostly reputation. During the mid-nineteenth century, a local farmer named Jonathan Koons built a "spirit room" where he and his family communicated with 165 separate spirits who demonstrated their presence by shooting guns, playing instruments, and displaying visions of disembodied spectral hands that felt, apparently, like the hands of corpses. The Koons family hosted hundreds of visitors over several years, and the events that occurred on their property were written up in books and magazines that caught the attention of people as far away as Britain. Adding to the mystique, the Koons' residence (no longer standing) was on top of Mt. Nebo, the highest point in Athens County and reportedly a place of such spiritual significance that local Native American tribes considered it off-limits.

One of the old Mental Health Center buildings at The Ridges. Photo courtesy Fred and Stephanie Kight.

Ghost stories are also attached to various residences still standing in the city. These include the former house of a hermit woman who appears to be as reluctant to leave her home in spirit as she was in body, and another property where a murdered woman's ghost remains attached to an antique drum (now used as a flower pot) that was used to dispose of her body.

Supernatural tales abound in the rural vicinity as well. At nearby Lake Hope, a headless conductor is thought to haunt the woods near the Moonville Tunnel, where he was struck as he attempted to flag down a train. Vague tales of restless Adena Indian spirits accompany the findings of arrowheads and putative burial mounds; similarly vague stories are murmured about the ghosts of unfortunate miners taken by tragic subterranean accidents. The Athens area also has seen its fair share of cult rituals—including graveyard gatherings and potential animal sacrifices—which both stem from and add to the sometimes ominous supernatural history of the town.

An Athens native and resident for nearly twenty years, I have yet to experience a haunting—and this despite living in a 150-year-old farm house that was part of the Underground Railroad and sits only a mile away from one of the pentagram cemeteries. My failure certainly does not stem from a lack of trying. Over the years I have visited many of Athens' most (in)famous spiritual locations: I got goosebumps in broad daylight after walking through Moonville Tunnel; I felt the disquiet of staring through the barred, yawning windows at the old asylum before it was renovated; I visited old, mossy cemeteries and photographed an angel tombstone that supposedly weeps and flutters her wings. My overactive imagination made these visits thrillingly chilling experiences and proved that I—like so many others past and present—was not immune to the mysteries and lore of this intriguing Appalachian town. After all, the mountain foothills are a place of stunning beauty, with rocky outcroppings, dark hollows, and brooding trees. They have watched the movements of humans for thousands of years and are the final unmarked resting place of countless souls—some of whom died in peace, many more of whom did not. In a place like that, you don't have to go far to find a haunting. There are ghosts everywhere. ❖

Websites of Interest:

http://www.athensohio.com/whattodo/index.php?page=131
http://www.prairieghosts.com/oh-athen.html
http://www.forgottenoh.com/page1.html
http://www.hauntedathensohio.com/

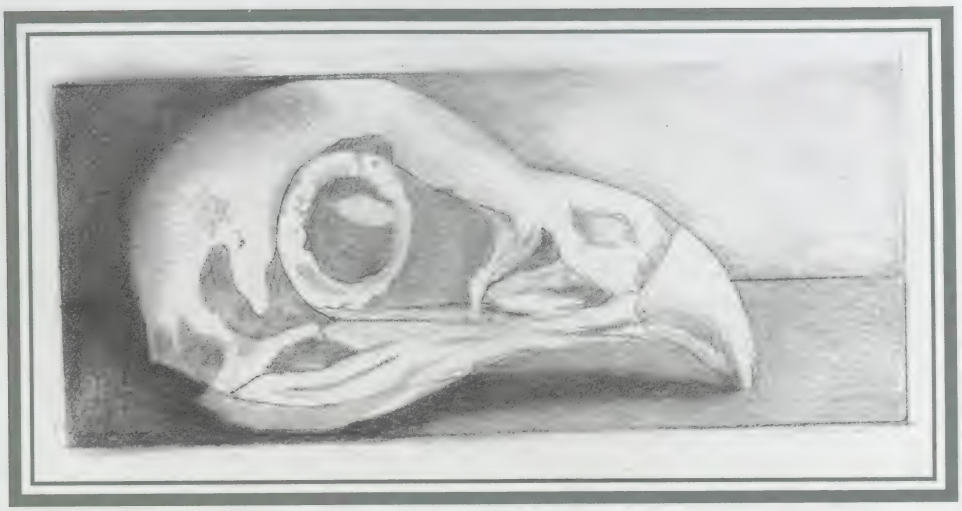
Caitlin Kight is a doctoral student in the applied science department at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. In her spare time, she is a freelance writer for birding magazines. This is her inaugural appearance in *Now & Then*.

A tombstone from a cemetery at The Ridges. Photo courtesy Fred and Stephanie Kight.

BOOGERMAN

JEFF KERR

Based on a real incident that occurred in Elkhorn, Kentucky, in the early 1970s.



The two boys played in an ash pile, wet and clumpy like sand. They built roads and caves for plastic Army men. Their voices were lowered to mock the voices of soldiers. The tide of dusk was pulling slowly from the trees and clefts of the mountains and over the houses and shacks by the Big Sandy. The one boy, Jefferson, had been raised primarily in Chicago by his mother and father. Summers were spent with his father's parents.

The other boy, Sean, was Jefferson's Irish twin—meaning that Sean was Jefferson's cousin born on the exact same day and year almost to the minute. The boys played together every minute they could but otherwise were shy children who pulled away from the company of strangers, child and grownup alike.

Jefferson looked up across the creek called the Big Sandy and watched as the trees on the mountain lost their detail and turned into dark green clumps with patches of darkness. He thought he made out a figure in the shadows watching them, tall and thin, skulking among the pine and shadows. Jefferson could make out a wide oval face the color of dirty sand with a red clown's smile and the cold, open eyes of a dead deer. A dark entanglement of hair hung down in long and dirty folds. The pine branches shifted, and the figure faded back into mountain darkness.

"See that?" asked Jefferson.

"What?"

"That guy. That person back in there."

"Do what?"

"Up on the mountain lookin' at us."

"I haven't seen nobody."

"I seen him. Looked like a skeleton sort of. An Indian skeleton kind of like."

"Boogerman!"

"What?"

"You done seen a boogerman," Sean said.

A deep bell tolled and Sean ran off, leaving his Army men in the ash pit. "Mommy's ringin' the bell for supper. Bye!"

The next day, Jefferson and Sean crossed the Big Sandy, making their way over a decaying swinging bridge of missing wooden planks and rusting support coils. They walked the clay road and ventured down a footpath, turning over fat stones looking for salamanders. They came upon the remains of a cabin. Only the floor, burnt wood, a stone chimney, waterlogged clothes, and a mattress remained. Sean picked up a charred piece of wood that looked like the rough hide of an alligator. He swung it down on a cloudy pane of glass, shattering it.

"Rexton Sawyer's place," he said.

"Who?"

Illustration by Randy Sanders.

"Rexton Sawyer. Old man who lived here. Granny woman up yonder put a spell on him and caused lightnin' to hit his house. Burnt straight to the ground. Swear to God."

"He dead?"

"Uh-uh. In a nursing home now. Can't get around none too good."

Sean pitched a rock through green vines and thorn branches.

"Wanna see where the Granny Woman lives?" he asked, a crooked smile on his pale face.

"Yeah!"

Even though it was mid-morning, the holler was already in half-darkness as if twilight were frozen there forever. The shack was hammered together from random logs and boards. A chimney of river stones jammed out of the roof askew. The warped plank door was closed and painted a bright red. The boys crept slowly up to the shack and peered through a window.

The inside of the shack was dusty, and the air swam with weak and strained sunlight. Dead snakes were nailed to a wall next to bunches of drying herbs and plants. An unpainted shelf held the skulls of small animals and little clay figures in the shapes of people. There was no movement in the house.

"Let's get out of here!" Jefferson whispered harshly, his mind burning with fear. He and Sean crashed though the overgrowth, laughing. They ran across the bridge not daring to look back. Their minds burned with pictures of demons with the scaled flesh of snakes, faceless men of mud and clay, old and withered women flying through the air on brooms. Jefferson thought he heard a rough throbbing, whispering chant in his ear as he ran: "Shadow. Shadow. Shadow of the dog."

As they crossed the bridge, a splinter of rust caught in Jefferson's palm from the cable, and he saw commas of blood spatter on the unpainted boards as he ran.

They hid in Jefferson's Pawpaw's furnace room. A coal-burning furnace hunched in one half of the mildewy stone room. On the opposite wall was a gas mask bag from World War I. A small leather pouch hung on the same nail and held a noxious clump of shriveled plants and herbs. A peacock feather leaned next to the door.

"What's in that little ol' poke?" asked Sean.

Jefferson shrugged his shoulders. "Some kind of plants. Like what that granny woman had in her shack."

"Mommy says your Pawpaw is part Indian. Maybe that's an Indian thing, those plants."

"I don't know."

"We should ask him."

"Uh-uh."

Jefferson's Pawpaw was not a mean man but a formidable one you approached with respect and no foolishness.

"You think that boogerman ever get us?" asked Jefferson.

Sean shook his head like a dog trying to break the neck of a small animal. "Not as long as I got legs to run."

Jefferson swallowed and focused his eyes on the peacock feather.

"You hain't got to worry none. There hain't no boogerman up in Chicago. Long as you watch what you do in these hills, you'll be all right."

Jefferson got up and pushed through the screen door. A salamander lay dead among the moss and gravel. He wanted to pick it up but resisted. The shadows lengthened and grew from the mountains like a vast quilt being slowly pulled up to the chin of the house. He knew he would be safe in the house of his grandparents with its tin roof, mouse holes in the ceiling, rusty water that stank like rotten eggs, and unspoken love that chained through generations of blood and struggle to keep the shadows from becoming harder and more dangerous things.

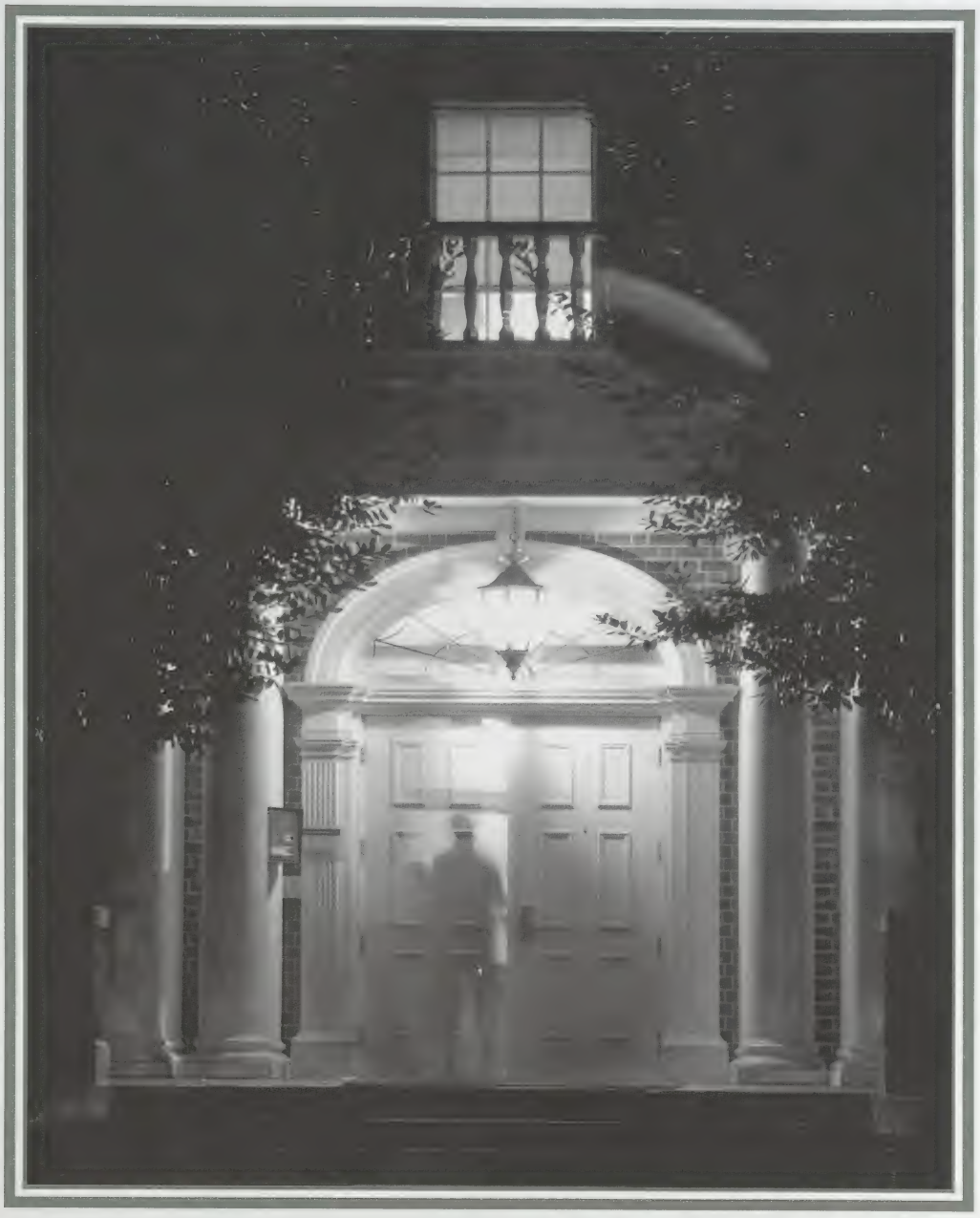
A bell rang in the distance. Sean came out, the screen door squeaking shut behind him.

"That's Mommy. Suppertime. See ya!"

Sean took off running to his home. Jefferson watched him as bats danced in the last of the day. Lightning bugs began to flash yellow back in the darkness of the hills. He wondered if the boogerman would ever lay his rotting bone hand on him. He wondered if the boogerman would ever follow him to Chicago and take from him every good and strong thing he had ever come to know. He thought of the boogerman patiently making his way from the dark hills and hollers, coming miles and miles through the darkness, the forests, the swimming rivers, his yellowing teeth frozen in a grin that held no joy. ❖

Jeff Kerr lives in Waukegan, Illinois. He is a 2006 Denny C. Plattner Award winner for his short story "The Miner's Friend."

AURAL EVIDENCE OF MARBLE BOY



"Ping-pong sounds of marbles dropping and rolling across the floor of East Tennessee State University's Lucille Clement Hall have been reported for the past twenty years. Some credit the mischief of Marble Boy, one of several spirits who are believed to reside on the campus."

Joe Smith
Director of Media Relations
East Tennessee State University

Entrance to Lucille Clement Hall. Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

THE HAUNTING QUESTION

DOT JACKSON

It comes, in time, to all of us who have been on close terms with the Other Side. When we have moved through a long life in the company of shadows, it will occur to us that for all the familiarity, there are basic things we still do not know.

What are ghosts, really? Why are they here? And what do they want?

That spirits dwell and move among us, some of us have never doubted. In my family, back to antiquity, the trait of "second sight" has run among us. Portentous things have come to us in dreams. We are aware of visitors we cannot see, most often in a time of stress or anguish. Sometimes they bring us comfort and assurance we can in no way explain. And sometimes they scare us half to death.

I lived in a plain little modern house once, where there was so much "activity" by the Unseen that had I been forced to spend a night there alone, I could have died of fright. The knocking on the walls, the tabletops, the headboard of the bed; dishes shattering though untouched by anything visible; the inside doors of empty rooms slamming, again and again; and the outside doors coming open of themselves—just for starters—got the attention of many who stayed there.

But what was it—really?

Are we talking about an entity that once had been as alive as we are, walking the halls, descending the stairs, moving things just as we do in life? Or is it something else—some other energy, of another realm apart from ours? Some "parallel reality," where other lives, of sorts, share this same space with us, but maybe no more aware of us than most of us are of them?

Endlessly enthralling, when we let ourselves dwell on it. But not in a clammy house, alone.

A young woman I met in Ashe County, North Carolina, studied these things and had some theories. She had become aware (though not through me) of what seemed to be a destructive spirit loose in my own mountain neighborhood, a hundred miles or more removed.

A quarrelsome old lady of our community had passed on a while back, angry that people she did not like would come to control her property. So she seemingly was making it very unpleasant—such things as a rat found roasting in the oven with food for a multitude of guests, and gorgeous blooming flowers yanked up and thrown under the floor.

"You have an old lady you need to get rid of," said my new-found friend. "I will talk with her and help her to move on over," she said. Which she did, and after a couple of such other-worldly conversations, things did seem to calm down.

This is what happens, my friend explained. "Usually when we die, there is someone who comes for us—someone who loved us in this life, who will lead us over. But—sometimes—"

It seems there are some who made it across, themselves, who were only too glad to get away from

Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

difficult people left on this side and are not eager to bring the troublemakers to the Happy Land. And there are some here who simply do not wish to go. They have died with unfinished business and won't willingly depart.

Is that what we run into, that breathes cold upon our necks and rises as a vapor in the dark of the attic staircase? I don't know. The oddest thing is that the "spirit" might be yet among the living but sometimes finds its freedom to escape the flesh, perhaps in sleep, and roam. Is it possible, even, that we roam through time as well?

The happiest time of my childhood was lived in an old farmhouse near the Tennessee line, in western North Carolina. My father worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority during the building of several dams on the Tennessee River's tributaries. Housing was always scarce. Like all other such families, we found what we could. Sometimes it was grotesque. For those few blessed months, however, we lived in what I thought was paradise.

The farm was a thousand acres, mostly woods. The place came with a barn, mules, a cow, pigs, men's and ladies' outhouses, grand pastures, springs and rushing creeks, and an elderly landlord couple who were a ready-made set of grandparents. They rented us the upstairs of their house, which was large enough to shelter us all.

There was a real grandchild my age, "Little Edgar." And across the creek lived a multitude of children I quickly came to love. We played in the woods, unmolested by supervision. We rode the mules and fished in the millpond, and in the fall, we traipsed in a straggly rank down through the cornfield, across the footlog, and up a near-vertical path to the mountaintop school. It was home as home had never been before.

Then came Pearl Harbor. My daddy was pulled out and sent to Florida, to work on a blimp base. But for many years to come, when I dreamed, I was back in that old house, with its wrap-around porches and old-time flowers and its peculiar aura of permanence and love.

We stayed in touch with our mountain friends over the years. We went back once when I was pregnant with my first child, to hug the beloved old "granny" who had just become a widow. A few years later, I went back again, this time to the churchyard where she, too, now lay, along with a depressing number of my childhood friends. Tuberculosis was once rampant among the young.

Years later, when I was well past fifty, on one cold and beautiful October Saturday, my husband said, "Let's go somewhere!" With no preparation, no reservations, we threw some camping gear into the car and started west, from Charlotte. We thought we'd get a motel room once we were in the mountains, but by stopping time, there was no room in any inn. It was a leaf-season weekend.

Well, we figured, maybe there would be something if we went on to Chattanooga. It was hours past dark, and a frosty mist hung over every low place. We were tired. A few miles west of Murphy, North Carolina, I said, "Pretty soon there will be a road going off to the left, beside a store. Slow down and take it."

"What's there?" asked my husband. It was no news to him that I was crazy. But he watched, and turned, and a short way down the gravel road, there was a sign, "Campground," and an open gate with a light over it. We pulled in, and I got out of the car. A golf cart was coming toward us. When it stopped and the driver got out, I saw his face, a little worn, like mine. "Little Edgar!" I said. "It's Bitsy."

"Bitsy!" said Little Edgar. We had not seen each other in over forty years. We embraced and tears rolled down our faces.

"Come on to the house," he said. "No," I said. "Let us sleep in the corn crib." And he did. Snug in our sleeping bags, sung to by the creek, we slept like the dead. Next morning we drank coffee in the familiar old kitchen and looked through the house once again.

Another twenty-five years went by. Last fall, a friend and I were on our way to Nashville. "You will come to a little road soon, that goes off down by a store. Take it, and I'll show you heaven," I said.

When we got down to the house, the weeds were high. The banister hollyhocks were dead. The porch roof had collapsed. The barn lay under the honeysuckles, dead limbs strewn everywhere. But out of the corner of my eye, I caught a little girl, looking out an upstairs window at us. Of course, when I turned to really look, she had ducked away.

Who is that child? How did she get there? There was something about her I thought I knew.

Only later, far off in the night, did it come.

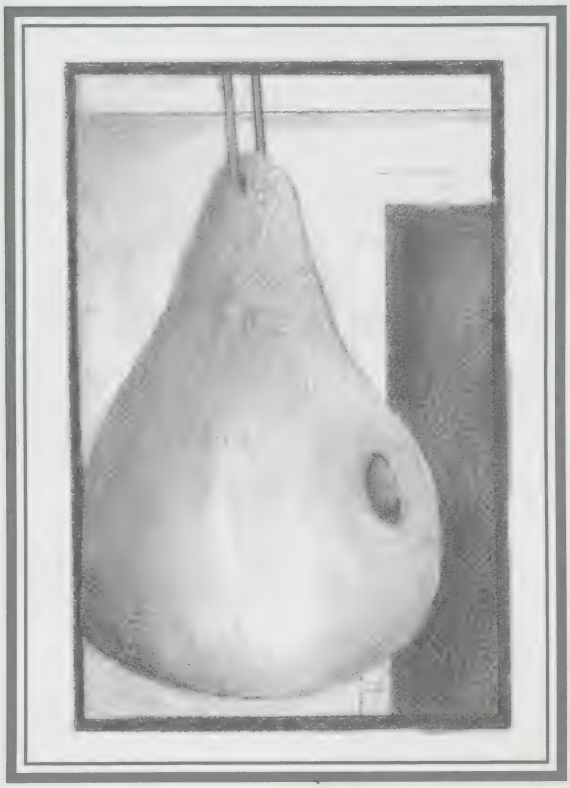
Seventy years ago, she was me. ❖

Dot Jackson worked for newspapers for over forty years. At home in the mountains of South Carolina, she has written one novel, *Refuge*, about a house whose family never leaves.

Note: See *Now & Then's* "Wildness" issue (Vol. 23 No. 2) for Britt Kaufmann's article about Dot Jackson.

GOURD

JESSIE VAN EERDEN



I was a child when my family was given a varnished bottle gourd, one that had been brought in off the vine and dried until its seeds rattled, with a hole cut in its belly—a hole big enough for a wren or a chickadee. We pierced it through at the top with coat-hanger wire to hang it. It made for a handsome birdhouse to fill with seed and welcome small birds under the eaves in winter, but Mom liked it as a decoration inside the house and kept it hung from a nail on the mantle.

When the day was clear and cold, this birdhouse gourd, though indoors, seemed brittle and cold enough to shatter like a thing made of ice. But it was there, hanging from the mantle above the hearth, and it glowed on the side facing the fire, so it would have sooner melted or browned in the heat than it would have shattered from the cold. Yet, as I looked at the gourd, I could've sworn it was about to crack with cold. I imagined it hanging where the snow blew. I saw the wren ducking in to feed on millet, the snow crystals lining the bottom edge of the hole in a sheer white grin, and then—the cold overcoming it, first cracking and then shattering, millet and thistle seed darkening the drift below and the wren startled in midair. To me, the gourd inhabited both the outside and the inside, the two worlds of my childhood existence. And that's the best way I can speak of Beatty, the small church at the top of Church Hill in the Whetsell Settlement in rural West Virginia, and which really sat in two worlds.

The church and all its members were always about to die and always about to be born; the order didn't make much difference since death and rebirth were the same thing in the Gospels. There were always two kinds of life, the one lived in a body warmed by fire and the one lived in the spirit. And two kinds of death, one that stopped the pulse and one that shrouded the soul. Always one foot in a puddle of dark water, the other foot on dry crisp frosted ground, walking. We were taught to understand this earthly place, its shadow and corner and leaf, so to be prepared to receive the kingdom to come, the land over Jordan we sang about in hymns. Our stake was to be in the other world, yet that was why we were taught to heft ourselves into this one, to memorize its textures and handle its string bean, spout, and tendon—I suppose it had to do with the incarnation of Christ, divine and human at once. It was like being in love and being lonely at once. When we had the Christmas pageant, the first part came from a five-year-old with her hands upraised, blurring the two worlds of past and present with a shout: Christ is come! ❖

Jessie van Eerden's work has appeared in Houghton Mifflin's *Best American Spiritual Writing 2006*, *Oxford American*, and other publications. She holds a master of fine arts in nonfiction writing from the University of Iowa.

Illustration by Randy Sanders.

THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS OF WILHELMINA BANKS

RANDY SANDERS

"My sons and I never forgot the time we were trapped in a herd of elephants. We were touring a Tanzanian wild game park in a Volkswagen, and you know how small they are, when I noticed we had passed over the same small, wooden bridge a couple of times. I asked the driver if he was lost. 'No mama, it's good,' he said."

It wasn't good.

"The driver abruptly stopped the car and said 'Be quiet.'

"We were so close to the elephants we didn't realize what they were! They were just a shapeless background all around us. The driver cut the motor. We were frozen.

"My youngest child is Kwabla; his older brother is Ebubedike. Ebubedike was breathing so hard that Kwabla said to him, 'Stop breathing!'

"I'll never forget that," she laughs.

"Slowly [the word is stretched like a rubber band], the elephants walked on. Thank goodness they intersected us at the back of the herd

Wilhelmina Banks. Photo courtesy Randy Sanders.

where the aunts and mommies and babies were. The bulls were up ahead. If you're interested in seeing elephants up close, that was an excellent adventure," she pauses, "just not in a Volkswagen!"

Wilhelmina S. Banks is a natural-born storyteller. She leans in; pulls back. Her hands gesture and then fall quietly into her lap. Voice, eyes, hands, and body seem calibrated to an inner rhythm. She is a force of nature, and none-too-shy about sharing it.

What took this Bristol, Virginia, native to Tanzania and Ghana by way of Morristown, Tennessee, and New York City is a story in itself, but one quickly learns Wilhelmina Banks is about a great deal more than biography and geography. She swims in deep waters, and she asks you to join her in the deep end. We dive in.

She talks about her mother's gentle, dignified, explanatory nature and her father's indignant-at-social-injustice demeanor. We talk about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and Malcolm X (the civil rights leader with whom she most identifies); and about her New York work in the civil and human rights struggle. I ask if she has early memories of racial discrimination in Bristol. (She graduated from Bristol's Frederick Douglass High School in 1949 at age sixteen.)

"Almost from birth, if that is possible. You know, I've been in many a crowd of people, white people, and they'll talk about the old days in Bristol and say, 'Weren't those Bunting's hot dogs good?' Bunting's Drug Store was famous for their hot dogs. And I'll say, 'I don't know, I never had one.' 'What! You never had one?' 'No, I never had one.' They wouldn't serve Negroes at the counter, and my father said, 'If you can't sit down to be served at the counter, then you're not going to eat there. And I'd better not catch you in there!'

"We wouldn't dare go into Bunting's. Are you kidding? That's kind of how we grew up under his instruction."

Those who know Banks well understand her "No Justice, No Peace" greeting when she answers the phone.

"The teachings of the past, and the deeds of those who are now ancestors, are our ancestral spirits. All that I have learned, and all that I am, is part of those ancestral spirits.

"You have to understand, I'm not talking about ghosts. I'm talking about that energy that is part of all living things. Every time I go up the street to the place where I was born [she is lost in reflection for a moment]—there was an old, wild rose bush that sat next to the fence, very pretty. You don't see wild roses much anymore. It was my responsibility to see that that rose bush was cared for after I returned to Bristol, to see that it was trimmed, and that the weeds didn't smother it.

All that I have learned, and all that I am, is part of those ancestral spirits.

"After a while, I neglected that bush, and in that neglect, it left. You'll notice I said 'left.' I don't say, too often, 'died,' because ancestors never completely die, they leave. But now, when I go up to the house where I was born, as far as I'm concerned, that bush is there. There are little pieces of it there.

"You have to care for the [ancestral] spirits, because if you don't, you'll forget them. And they'll let you know you have forgotten them.

"Last Saturday morning I was sitting at the kitchen table after finishing my breakfast, and I just started writing. This is what I wrote [she hands me a single sheet of paper]."

The inner rhythm that animates her storytelling also guides her writing. The free verse she hands me, "Ancestral Spirits," states, in part:

> Anxious, waiting, the wild pink rose bush,
> Trying to hold onto the fading blooms,
> Not as young as it used to be.
> Fragrant faint sweet scents in the air,
> Still lingering though the bush is no longer there.

And a little farther down the page:

> For all of nature, all the past,
> Are spirits' dwelling place,
> Especially the elders, the wise,
> Guiding their loved ones by their examples and wisdom,
> Ancestral spirits,
> Always near,
> Blessed by God, they live on.

"Do you know what a *griot* is?" she asked when I first contacted her by phone.

"My mother was a collector, and my grandmother was a collector. At the age of six I was designated the griot of our family. At that time we had never heard of the term, but as you now know, it means 'storyteller and keeper of the records.'

"I knew then, at that tender age, I was being treated differently than my siblings. When the adults were gathered, they would tell my siblings to go play, but I was instructed to stay. At first, I resented it and wondered why they were doing that to me. I came to see that's what they were expecting of me—to be the keeper of the records. So, I was privy to an awful lot at a very young age."

Like her mother and grandmother before her, Banks became a collector—not just of community stories but of artifacts as well. If one wants to experience "community spirit" at work, a visit to the museum Banks opened in 1996 is well worth the effort. Researching the museum at www.virginia.org is a good place to begin.

The NYUMBA YA TAUSI-Peacock Museum (NYUMBA YA TAUSI is Kiswahili for "House of Peacocks," named to honor African American males) sits on Clinton Avenue in Bristol, Virginia, next to the Banks residence. The museum contains over 6,000 artifacts: objects from Africa, items from the era of slavery, local black memorabilia, and family heirlooms.

As part of her studies at Brooklyn College, where she received a master's degree in education, guidance, and counseling, Banks developed a concept called "Museumtherapy." It is underpinned by the recognition that art and artifacts can be used to build self-esteem and promote a positive multicultural awareness.

Many of us know that the banjo has its roots in Africa, but most have likely never seen a banjo drum made from a groundhog's skin. Perhaps the Underground Railroad is common knowledge, but Underground Railroad quilts with cleverly-hidden, slave-stitched maps to the North are lesser known. Medicinal herbs—ask Wilhelmina. Patents, filed by or stolen from African American inventors—ask Wilhelmina.

From gallery to gallery, her passion for life becomes palpable. And like the shapeless background of elephants, ancestral spirits are all around. ❖

Randy Sanders is managing editor of *Now & Then*.

The NYUMBA YA TAUSI-Peacock Museum. Photo courtesy Randy Sanders.

ELEGY FOR THE APIARIST

CONNIE JORDAN GREEN

It's the small things that stop you—
his pajamas hanging on the chair back,
his pipe still smelling of cherry tobacco.

You take home his bee equipment—
smoker to throw up vapors that quiet the bees,
coveralls to secure against stings,
a veil to hide your face.

Connie Jordan Green lives on a farm in East Tennessee and is the author of novels for young people, a poetry chapbook, and a bi-weekly newspaper column that has run for thirty-one years.

HEAVEN

MICHAEL CHITWOOD

She'd lived, mostly on her own, for ninety-five years. And she loved to grow flowers. It was in her garden where I had seen my first hummingbird taking a sip from the red chalice of one of her blossoms. She always had some flowers growing. In the winter, pots crowded every available spot in her cramped house. In the spring they would cover the picnic table on her porch and hang all along its eaves. It was modest and homespun, but I always thought it a version of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, at least in intent if not in scale.

Of course, Babylon wouldn't sound good to her. She was a believer, a believer in the old-fashioned, hard-shell sense. Babylon would probably only bring to her mind the words of Isaiah and his admonishments against that corrupt place.

But I meant it as a kind of earthly paradise, and I was thinking about that kind of paradise and other sorts too because I was hearing so much about them. My father kept saying to all the visitors that he knew where she was now, meaning Heaven. One person said, by way of comforting words, that he supposed the Lord needed another angel to tend the gardens of Heaven. And a relative said to me that since she had died on Christmas Eve, she made it to Heaven in time for the big birthday party. It was all I could do not to reply, "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard." Suddenly I saw all my dead relatives and friends sitting around with little pointed party hats on. There was a shiny metallic banner made from foil letters that read "Happy Birthday, Jesus." On their laps, people were balancing paper plates that held little squares of yellow cake with white icing. No, wait, this is Heaven, so the plates balance themselves. Or maybe they float up to your mouth when you're ready to take a bite.

Actually, I felt as perplexed as a little boy I once heard on an airplane. As we taxied down the runway for takeoff, the child asked his brother if we were going to see Jesus.

"No," the older boy replied.

"Are we going into the clouds?" the child wanted to know.

"Yes," said his now annoyed brother.

"Then, why aren't we going to see Jesus?"

The older brother shrugged. I shrugged too as I listened to her minister describe the streets of gold where she was now walking without the pain of her arthritis or the swelling in her legs.

Maybe Heaven is whatever you need it to be. Maybe it is a garden thrumming with hummingbirds for her. Maybe it's the warm, bright light people back from near-death experiences describe. I guess she knows now. If we can be said to know anything after we are dead. Maybe we know everything all at once.

In the late afternoon after the funeral, I took my father back to the grave—just the two of us in the quiet graveyard. He plucked three roses from the flower arrangement that covered the fresh mound of earth. I noticed that the gravediggers had already sown grass on the ground beneath the flowers. I could see the tiny seeds scattered there and thought whatever it's like for them to awaken and become something else I bet it's like that. And then we got back in the car and went home to rooms full of flowers. ❖

Born and raised in the hills of the Virginia Blue Ridge, Michael Chitwood is a freelance writer and a visiting lecturer at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. His collection *Gospel Road Going* was awarded the 2003 Roanoke-Chowan Prize for poetry.

Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

DO SPORTING SPIRITS INHABIT NUMBERS?
THE OLD PASSION FOR SHUTOUTS AND LOPSIDED SCORES IN AND AROUND APPALACHIA

ROBERT J. HIGGS

One of the most popular publications during the middle of the rampaging nineteenth century was *The Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and Stage* (1830-1861). The editor, William T. Porter, put together two of the most famous collections of humorous and popular writing of the century, *The Big Bear of Arkansas* (1845) and *A Quarter Race in Old Kentucky* (1846), with sport and the tall tale among the major themes. The historian Thomas D. Clark was exactly on target when he observed, "Sporting was the lifeblood of the frontier."

Well before the official closing of the frontier in 1894, a relatively new sport, football, was gaining in popularity, but from 1895 to 1905 it came under fire because of the number of deaths and injuries associated with it. To some it was worse than the old "rough and tumble" of the backwoods, despite its stubborn endorsement by some of the leading colleges, as well as people in high places, among them Teddy Roosevelt.

In the debate over football, Roosevelt had an important ally, the United States Military Academy, which let it be known that if football were abolished in the schools, its cadets would keep on playing. Football survived, and in 1914 the academy earned its first national championship, led by future generals Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, James Van Fleet, Jr., and Robert Reese Neyland, who would go on to build a legend as coach at the University of Tennessee.

In 1969 coaches voted Neyland as the greatest in their profession for the first one hundred years of college football, second only to Knute Rockne, whom Neyland claimed as a mentor. Neyland was a defensive genius. After he came to Knoxville in 1926, his habit of inflicting shutouts on the competition was impressive in itself, but in Appalachia, such a grand talent was more like the culmination of a long tradition in the South, especially in Tennessee.

The tale of the mighty zero in the mountains begins in 1899 with the "Iron Men" of Sewanee, the University of the South. Their remarkable feat is best described by Joe Paterno, longtime head coach at Penn State: "While there are some who would swear to the

Photo of General Robert Neyland leading a post-game celebration. Photo courtesy University of Tennessee Sports Information.

contrary, I did not see the 1899 Sewanee football team play in person. Winning five road games in six days, all by shutout scores, has to be one of the most staggering achievements in the history of the sport. If the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) had been in effect in 1899, there seems little doubt Sewanee would have played in the title game. And they wouldn't have been done in by any computer ratings."

Here is their record:

Oct. 21	Sewanee 12	@ Georgia 0
Oct. 23	Sewanee 32	@ Georgia Tech 0
Oct. 28	Sewanee 46	Tennessee 0
Nov. 3	Sewanee 54	Southwestern 0
Nov. 9	Sewanee 12	@ Texas 0
Nov. 10	Sewanee 10	@ Texas A&M 0
Nov. 11	Sewanee 23	@ Tulane 0
Nov. 13	Sewanee 34	@ LSU 0
Nov. 14	Sewanee 12	@ Ole Miss 0
Nov. 20	Sewanee 71	Cumberland 0
Nov. 30	Sewanee 11	@ Auburn 10
Dec. 2	Sewanee 5	@ North Carolina 0

Vince Brewton has captured key signs of the spirit of sport at work in his *Southern Scribes* review of *Ninety-Nine Iron: The Season Sewanee Won Five Games in Six Days* by Wendell O. Givens: "During the halcyon days of college football, teams were already using players who seldom attended class, in some cases not even enrolling in the university," Brewton writes. "The Iron Men were cast from a very different mold. The epic heroes who boarded the 'Mountain Goat' in 1899 included five law students, four medical students, and four theological students. . . . These men were exemplars of their age, for the worse but also for the better, when the fans of losing teams applauded the victors."

The dorm matrons at Sewanee sent the Iron Men off on the road with a cheer that says it all.

Rah, rah, ree, who are we?
S-e-w-a-n-e-e, double e!
Rough, tough, we are the stuff,
We play football, never get enough.

Another who never got enough of football, judging from his winning record, was Fielding "Hurry-Up" Yost from Fairview, West Virginia. In 1901, his first year as coach at the University of Michigan, the team outscored opponents 550-0 en route to the first Rose Bowl game and a 49-0 victory over Stanford. During Yost's first five seasons, Michigan outscored its opponents 2,821 to 42, earning the team the nickname "Point-a-Minute."

Yost won his most lopsided victory at the expense of his alma mater, West Virginia University (where he had studied law), by a score of 130-0 in 1904. Ever after he carried a newspaper clipping that described the WVU players speaking as if they had been invaded by Martians instead of Wolverines. With "gurgling satisfaction" Yost liked to read it as if sharing an Appalachian folk tale: "It is declared that every player on Yost's team weighed eight tons and had an average speed of 96 miles per hour. They breathed forth smoke and flames."

The same year Yost scalped the Mountaineers, one of his players, Dan McGugin (who was also his brother-in-law), brought the point-a-minute tradition to Vanderbilt University. From 1904 to 1917 and from 1919 to 1934, McGugin did a near-perfect imitation of his former coach, winning his first eleven games and outscoring opponents 452-4. According to Nashville sportswriter Fred Russell, "For years he ruled supreme in Dixie. . . . More than any one man, he was responsible for the progress of southern football."

Michigan came to Nashville in 1922 to help dedicate Dudley Stadium, which has to rank as one of the most influential games ever played in the South. Present for the fanfare, parades, banquets, fashion shows, and delivery of the game ball by airplane were Cornelius Vanderbilt and his wife Sophia. Governor Alf Taylor played a leading role in hosting the descendents of the benefactors of the university.

The game resulted in a 0-0 tie, a "victory" for Vanderbilt, thanks to a pregame inspirational talk in the locker room by McGugin, an attorney, coach, and prankster. He reportedly told his players, "You are going against Yankees whose grandfathers killed your grandfathers in the Civil War." However, the Vanderbilt players were unaware of the fact that McGugin's father had been an officer in the Union Army.

Neyland came to Knoxville in 1926 with mainly one mission: Do something about Dan McGugin. And the Great McGugin never beat Tennessee again. "People think I'm the greatest damn coach in the world," said the great Bear Bryant, "but Neyland taught me everything I know." Neyland's teams defeated Bryant's seven times.

Neyland was to defense what Yost was to offense. *Sports Illustrated* named him the defensive coordinator of its all-century college football team in a "Best of the

20th Century" edition. His teams shut out opponents 112 times. In 1938 and 1939, Neyland's Volunteers set NCAA records when they shut out seventeen straight opponents for seventy-one consecutive quarters. His '39 squad is the last NCAA team in history to hold every regular-season opponent scoreless. (The team's streak ended in the post-season, with a 14-0 loss to Southern California in the Rose Bowl.)

Neyland trained not only great players but also great coaches. Bobby Dodd of Kingsport, Tennessee, would go on to coach at Georgia Tech. Herman Hickman from Johnson City, Tennessee, would coach at Yale. And Beattie Feathers of Bristol, Virginia, would coach both baseball and football at North Carolina State. Dodd, who had quarterbacked his high school squad to a 128-0 victory over Norton, Virginia, continued the shutout tradition as coach at Georgia Tech, once beating his old coach Neyland 27-0 in Atlanta.

One thing seems fairly clear: If you were going to play college football in the mountains in the early days, you could expect to get shut out or to have a wonderful time running up the score on a hapless team, be they medical students or a Sigma Kappa fraternity.

But as Grantland Rice said, whether winning or losing, what is essential on the field and off is the "uphill heart," a matter of spirit, not of outcome. ❖

A native of Marshall County, Tennessee, Robert J. Higgs is professor emeritus of English at East Tennessee State University and an internationally known authority on the literature and philosophy of sport.

1899 football team photo of the "Iron Men" of Sewanee, the University of the South. Photo courtesy the University of the South Athletic Department.

MY FATHER'S ASHES

KATHRYN BONDURANT SMITH

Beside the French Broad River
I powder a black snake white.
I hadn't seen it roped round
The bank, though I will not call
Such happenings accidents.
Daddy slipped through my fingers
To dust the shore. What remained
In my palm came from his mouth.
The crown from his soft molar
Sat in my hand like a word,
Small and gray, the relief
Of what was and is no more.
What strange Fahrenheit can burn
The body but spare the silver?
I licked my fingertip first
And felt the ashes dissolve,
A part of me forever.
And then, just so naturally,
Put that empty tin cup tooth
Onto my tongue, shut my mouth,
Turned it, praying it would fit.

Kathryn Bondurant Smith received five literary prizes during her graduate career at Radford University. As a starving artist and newlywed, she is inspired daily by her husband's willingness to eat cornbread and beans.

RAVIOLI AND RECOVERY:
THE SPIRIT OF LOBELLO'S SPAGHETTI HOUSE

FRED SAUCEMAN

Rose LoBello has stirred down red sauce for sixty-five years. She's never traveled to Italy, the land of her ancestors. She couldn't abandon her family's restaurant for that long.

Except for a few weeks when the place sold "West Virginia hot dogs," LoBello's Spaghetti House has plated up Italian-American fare in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, northwest of Pittsburgh, since 1944.

Rose started working in her parents' restaurant that year, when she was fourteen. Spaghetti, gnocchi, and ravioli took over her life. Kitchen labor kept her from graduating high school.

"My mother never really had a childhood," says her daughter, Rosalie Richards of Moon Township, Pennsylvania.

Rose later raised her own children in the restaurant. They napped in lettuce crates while she hand-mixed pasta dough. She cut gnocchi strips and hand-cranked them through a machine. She managed cauldrons of sauce and blended house-made salad dressing. She mixed and formed her own meatballs. She reveled in coconut cream and banana cream pies. She waited tables. She ran the cash register.

Since 2005, though, Rose has left the heavy lifting and the arm-tiring pasta making to her son Ben. After her foot was crushed in an automobile accident, Rose began taking large doses of Aspirin. A blood vessel ruptured in her brain. She survived the surgery to undergo months of extensive therapy, both physical and occupational.

"One of my three brothers, John, is a songwriter," says Rosalie. "He is very methodical, and his approach helped get her through."

LoBello's Spaghetti House. Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

Her therapists understood, too, that Rose LoBello's life had revolved around food, and they slowly reintroduced her to the kitchen.

"I made gnocchi for the nurses," Rose told us, after a meal of lasagna and ravioli in her restaurant.

Just as she's done with so many of the hardships in her life, Rose has turned a near-death experience into something good.

"That's how they started to rehabilitate her, by taking her into the kitchen, because the health care professionals thought they should give her something to do that she was good at," recalls Rosalie.

Although she's forbidden to lift a pot of sauce today because of her health, she can still season one, adding salt four times in a circle.

"My mother recovered remarkably," says Rosalie. "She never was a big talker, and that's the biggest change in her since the surgery. She's much more talkative."

Just as she's done with so many of the hardships in her life, Rose has turned a near-death experience into something good. That newfound verbosity has transformed her into the perfect hostess at LoBello's.

As her son Ben boils ravioli and fills manicotti in the kitchen, Rose moves to the front of the house, gliding from table to table, greeting customers as if she's known them her entire lifetime. She stopped by our table repeatedly, each time adding a chapter from her life story—talk of her father's work in the coal mines, her love of dancing, her Italian heritage, how she married her husband without ever having a date.

"Everyone knows her," says Rosalie. "We were at McDonald's yesterday having coffee, as we do from time to time just to get her out, and a little girl, maybe eight years old, comes up and gives her a hug. My mother calls kids her 'little angels.'"

Over a cup of homemade Italian wedding soup, the diminutive Rose LoBello shared with us her philosophy of life, in four short words: "I just love people." ❖

Fred Sauceman is a frequent contributor to "Inside Appalachia," a weekly radio program produced by West Virginia Public Broadcasting.

Rose LoBello. Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

INSIDE MARIO'S FISHBOWL

FRED SAUCEMAN

Bare wall space is scarce at Mario's Fishbowl in Morgantown, West Virginia. Handwritten notices cover almost every inch. A constant eating and drinking Olympics takes place here. Competitors document their records and post them for all to see: Bruce Bellman's consumption of eighteen hot dogs in one hour on February 21, 1969. Or the time in 1968 when Gene Dragavich drank a large fishbowl of beer in four seconds.

Tom and Anna Torch opened the business as the Richwood Avenue Confectionary in 1950. Later they started serving beer in large goblets. The glass vessels were products of the flourishing glass industry in West Virginia. When Rose and Mario Spina took over in 1963, they began calling the goblets "fishbowls."

"There are lots of records about how fast you can drink a fishbowl," says Bill Cain, a native of Morgantown and a graduate of Morgantown High School and West Virginia University. Now a school administrator in eastern Maryland, the former basketball coach often makes the pilgrimage back to the Fishbowl.

"Sitting right here one day, my buddy, who just got back from the military, from boot camp, said, 'I'll bet you five bucks I can eat this glass.' I said, 'It's not worth five bucks for me to see you eat the glass.' He said, 'You pay for the glass; I'll eat a chunk out of it.' He ate a chunk of glass, not out of one of these fishbowls but out of a Pilsener glass, and swallowed it. At that time I was working night shift at the hospital, and they told me that's the best way I know to die, to die from hemorrhaging.

"Where you're sitting right now used to be a magazine rack, and we'd come and read comics and drink sodas. I'm sixty-two years old, and I knew it when I was five or six years old. It was a place to hang out, a place to sit down and have a beer and reminisce, remember. I was down here all the time, all the time. We used to get the hot dogs here, the chili dogs. The food's always good. I know a lot of stories about West Virginia athletics were resolved here on who should they hire, who they shouldn't hire."

Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

Karen and Mark Furfari bought Mario's Fishbowl in 1997. Karen says despite all the drinking records, it's a family-oriented business.

"We have customers who, when they have a newborn and they're discharged from the hospital, the first place they come with their newborn is the Fishbowl to have their picture taken with their baby in front of a fishbowl. Our clientele is a mixed bag: twenty-one-year-olds, twenty-two-year-olds, med students, law students, professionals. Mario's Fishbowl is very much an alumni

hotspot. Football games, this is where the alumni want to come, whether they're in their seventies, their forties, their fifties, their thirties, it doesn't matter."

Karen, a former management consultant from St. Louis, patterns many of her current business practices after the ways of Mario and Rose Spina. Posted prominently inside Mario's Fishbowl still today, above bags of salted cashews, is a rectangle of brown paper, hand-lettered by Mario and Rose, in all capital letters. Written in green magic marker, it reads: "Your life is God's gift to you. What you do with your life is your gift to him, so take good care of it and drive careful because he cares. Have a good day. Love always, Mario and Rose." Karen says Mario and Rose looked after their customers almost like parents would.

"Mario always said that Rose was the boss. And Mario was a very kind man. He was quiet, he was very wise, and he was very committed to his customers and his customers' safety. Mario would take their ID when they came in the door and ordered a beer, and he would check their ID even if they were fifty years old. It didn't matter. He was taking your ID. And then he would file your ID in a magazine and he would say to you, 'You're on page forty-seven.' He basically held the ID as ransom for his glass. If you said to Mario, 'I can't remember that, Mario,' he would give you a pen and tell you to write the page number on your hand. And you couldn't leave until you were finished and approached Mario and got your ID, and then you were able to leave."

WVU alumna Sandy Maguran remembers another Mario Spina trademark: "We always tried not to look at Mario's hand where his big toe was grafted on to replace his lost thumb."

Customers could not, independently, post eating and drinking records on the wall. Mario and Rose had exacting standards. You had to earn your record, your bit of precious wall space.

"We do have a stopwatch, as Mario did," Karen says. "And we struggle with so many people just coming in and saying, 'I want to get on the wall. Give me a slip so that I can put a record on the wall.'"

Going back to the days of the Spina family, many of those records are written on the backs of cut up cigarette cartons. No matter the material, though, each one had to be signed. To read them all would take hours. Karen shows me one, timed with that stopwatch to hundredths of a second: Herb Hand, extra large fishbowl, 5.98 seconds, on February 24, 2007.

The capacity of a fishbowl goblet at Mario's would be easy to measure in fluid ounces, but "How much beer does a fishbowl hold?" is a question you never ask. Karen and her husband made a verbal commitment to Mario and Rose never to share that "secret." And to this day, Karen adds, "On occasion, we make people unhappy when we refuse to answer that question, and we have never answered that question."

Ben Kocker posted a claim that he did a shot of Tabasco in 1.26 seconds on February 12, 1999. "What a man," he declared. Below his message for the ages, a friend added the humbling footnote, "Puked."

Fishbowl patron Leslie Filben Garrett recalls a customer who, after drinking several pitchers of beer, would balance a table on his chin.

Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

"After the staff wildly applauded his feat, he was thrown out," Leslie says. "This was a weekly ritual, every Thursday night."

Customers at Mario's don't just compete to set beer-drinking and hot-dog eating records. They eat cardboard coasters—the kinds made by beer distributors to promote their products.

"People have different methods for eating coasters," says Nikki Emerick, a server at the Fishbowl. "When we did the coaster-eating contest for the anniversary party that we have every year, there were people lined up along the bar. Some people tore the coasters into little pieces and put them right in their mouth. Other people soaked coasters in beer. I had a guy tell me that he thought the easiest way was to take it like a pill—tear it up into little pieces and then put it in your mouth and swallow it, with a drink. So that's what I've seen."

I ask Nikki if she's a coaster eater: "No, I'm not a fan of eating coasters, but I support it," she answers diplomatically.

Conventional, nourishing eating is perfectly acceptable at Mario's, too.

"We serve Philly cheesesteaks, chicken cheddar cheesesteaks," says Karen. "We have a fantastic Reuben. Our French fries are not frozen. We take potatoes and we hand-cut them. We have fishbowl chips which are hand-cut potato chips. Pretty much everything that we do here is made from scratch. Our meats and cheeses all come from Pennsylvania Macaroni Company in the Strip District in Pittsburgh."

Through the legacy of Mario and Rose Spina, whose photograph hangs prominently above the bar, the Fishbowl is testament to the influence of Italian immigrants in northern West Virginia.

The goblet, the Fishbowl itself, is a reminder of the role that glass-making has played in the economy of the Mountain State. For Mark and Karen Furfari, it's important to remember that history.

"The rewarding part about owning Mario's Fishbowl is customers leave so happy," Karen tells me. "People you don't even know will approach you and say, 'Thank you so much, the food was great. Loved the atmosphere, the beer's fantastic, thank you so much for not changing Mario's Fishbowl.'" ❖

Fred Sauceman is the author of *The Place Setting: Timeless Tastes of the Mountain South*, a three-volume book series on the foodways of Appalachia.

Logo courtesy Karen Furfari.

THE CHANNELS

MICHAEL CHITWOOD

It would have been easy to think
we were surrounded by a vast tundra,
given the squall of snow we looked through
to those Byzantiums of technology,
Lynchburg, Roanoke, Greensboro—13, 7, and 2.
Sometimes—so that the Old Rebel would emerge
from the icy mists to sing a story—
you had to hold the antennae, channeling
the mystical electric signal through your own
outstretched arms. You could almost feel
the cold of the cosmos from whence came
The Captain, Tom Terrific, and King Leonardo.
See us in our footie pajamas,
receiving what messages the atmosphere would allow?
We worked the rabbit ears like throttles
and hurtled ever deeper into the living room
pitching and bucking with the oncoming white blast.

Michael Chitwood's latest book is *Spill* (Tupelo Press). He teaches at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

IN THE BACK ROOM OF MEMORIES

DOLLY WITHROW

They were a strange couple to be sure—Cat Eye's beer joint and the Prayer and Faith Tabernacle. There they were, though, as if fate had had a warped sense of humor by juxtaposing this odd pair. The beer joint sat on one side of a narrow blacktopped road, while the tabernacle, perched on a typical West Virginia hill, looked down on Cat Eye's from the other side. Depending on the day of the week and the time of day, some of the same people frequented both places.

During the 1940s, Cat Eye's was the most popular watering hole in our area. Patrons could order Wiedemann beer in long-necked brown bottles or beer drawn straight from the tap. After ingesting enough spirits, though, many shy drinkers became talkative, while a few boisterous drinkers became reticent. There were those who laughed and those who swore and even those who fought. Cat Eye's, then, on any given Saturday night, was a rocking, jumping place.

I was about eleven at the time, an only child, and I lived in a two-story stucco house with a nontraditional family. My mother had divorced my father when I was five. As a result, we lived with my maternal grandparents and various aunts and uncles who moved in and out, depending on each one's twist of fortune. In the '40s, my Uncle Alfred, my mother's brother, and Ocie, his wife, lived with us. Each Saturday night as they dressed for an evening out at Cat Eye's, I begged my uncle to let me go with them. Several times he relented, and I was permitted to go where other children were not allowed. It was a different time, and no one interfered, so the three of us carefully made our way down the unpaved lane, avoiding the holes and large rocks. After descending the hill from our house, we crossed the skinny road toward a low-slung, white building. As we neared the beer parlor, I could hear the mingling of jukebox music, loud talk, and raucous laughter. The words of "Born to Lose" and "Walkin' the Floor Over You" still echo down through the years. Even today I can smell the odor of stale beer intermingled with cigarette smoke.

A bar faced the door of the dimly lit building, and I could see the backs of lean men in flannel shirts as they perched on swivel stools. To my left, a large rectangular opening led into a cavernous room that housed the jukebox. It boasted vertical convex panels filled with moving swirls of orange and yellow. Dark-varnished booths lined each side of the room. With my aunt and

The congregation of the Prayer and Faith Tabernacle in West Virginia, 1941. Photo courtesy Dolly Withrow.

uncle, I sat in a booth where I ate hot dogs and salty potato chips. I watched adults drink beer from frosty mugs as foam coated their upper lips. Some drank their spirits straight from the brown bottles. I drank my icy Coke straight from the bottle, too, and felt all grown up. I thought it was a special time for me to be able to hang out with the adults—and in a forbidden place. Looking back through the long distance of time, I now know that the spirits Cat Eye served in his beer joint provided a temporary escape for those who had lost jobs, lost loves, and squandered lives. Little wonder they placed coins in the jukebox slot and listened to their own stories put to music.

Even those who went astray from time to time were nonetheless mostly honest people.

Sunday mornings stood in stark contrast to Saturday nights at Cat Eye's. I walked in pale sunlight out to the end of our dirt road where the Prayer and Faith Tabernacle was located. With my neighborhood friends on Brickyard Hill, I entered the church where long rows of golden oak pews were lined front to back and down both sides. Before each service, my friends and I chose a pew near the front. Once the singing of hymns began, I belted out in a loud voice that was undoubtedly off-key. We sang the old traditional hymns: "Amazing Grace," "Just as I Am," and "Bringing in the Sheaves," which I interpreted as "Bringing in the Sheets."

There were no foot-stomping country songs in the church, but there was music and there was spirit, albeit a different kind from Cat Eye's. No tap could be turned on, and no bottle could be opened to gain access to this spirit. Grace alone ushered in the Holy Spirit. As a child, I watched with wide-eyed wonder as Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Marcum were blessed. Wearing long-sleeved dresses printed with tiny flowers of many colors, the middle-aged women soon began to wave snow-white handkerchiefs in small circles above their heads. It wasn't long before one would rise from her seat and run down the aisle, shouting as she went. Then the other soon followed. I could hear the congregation punctuating the women's shouting with "amen" and "praise the Lord." After the two ladies sat down again, I watched as they removed rimless eyeglasses and wiped tears from their faces. They wore no makeup, for to be vain was sinful. During the hot summers, church members would cool themselves with cardboard fans, each with a flat wooden handle and an image of Jesus accompanied by a small child and a lamb. The fans also displayed the name, address, and phone number of the local funeral home.

I attended that church until I was well into my teens, and I know that most of the members led good and decent lives. During church picnics, women in the church could leave their purses unattended and no one ever touched them. They all worked hard and prayed hard. Occasionally, someone backslid by falling off the wagon. No longer able to resist the call of the Sirens' song at Cat Eye's, they returned to another kind of spirits.

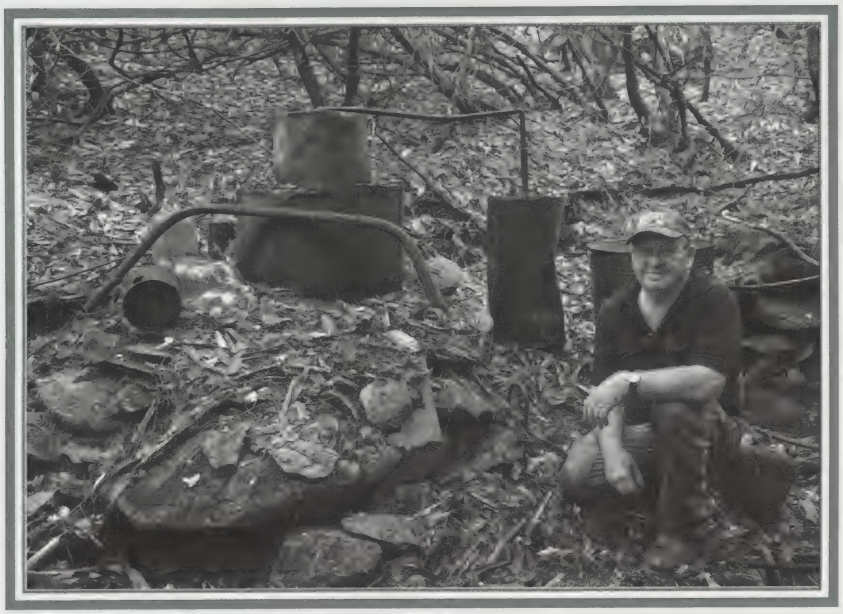
Even those who went astray from time to time were nonetheless mostly honest people. I remember my Grandfather Frame saying many times that if a man gave his word, that was good enough for him. Despite the hardscrabble lives we Appalachians lived, even after the Great Depression, crime was virtually unheard of, and all our neighbors left their doors unlocked.

Since the 1940s, I've learned much about life. I know that between the substance of present reality and the shadow of future uncertainty lurks the murky world of our memories. Stacked like old letters with fading words and images, our memories inhabit the back room of our inner landscape. The cadence of a country song, the smell of cigarette smoke, the sight of a roadside bar—any one of these can call forth memories of Cat Eye's, the Prayer and Faith Tabernacle, and an uncle who years earlier could not resist my childish pleading. All have disappeared in the folds of time. All of the relatives who lived with me in that stucco house so many years ago have died, but their spirits live on. ❖

A retired English professor, Dolly Withrow is the author of four books: *The Confident Writer,* a grammar-based college textbook; *From the Grove to the Stars*, a centennial history of West Virginia State College; and the essay collections *More than Penny Candy* and *Beyond the Apple Orchard.*

"STILL LIKE I LEFT IT"

MICHAEL JOSLIN



"Now, I loved making whiskey. I'd rather make whiskey than eat when I'm hungry. But if I had it to do over again, I'd never know what whiskey tasted like," says sixty-five-year-old Ralph, born and raised on a spur of the Blue Ridge in Western North Carolina.

It's been twenty-one years since he last spent the night tending his copper still beside the gurgling branch, twenty-one years without a drink of the corn whiskey he used to make. That many years ago he simply walked away from a tradition that goes back generations in his family.

Family is what began his whiskey making, and family is what stopped him from firing up the still. His father initiated him in the craft when Ralph was twelve years old. After thirty-two years, Ralph stopped making and drinking whiskey when his six-year-old daughter, Dawn, developed cancer.

"When she got sick I promised the Lord that as long as she lived, I wouldn't drink no more. That's when I stopped. When she died, I never went back," he says, his blue eyes blinking behind his glasses.

Returning to the still site is a journey back in time for Ralph. The branch where his last still stands also fed an earlier one that he and his father ran for eighteen years together. Starting off on an old logging road, Ralph heads into a hardwood forest as he climbs the ridge. The road turns into a rutted path, then into a barely discernible track. Finally it disappears altogether, and Ralph feels his way through the woods, the contours of the land leading him. Changes over twenty years make him a bit unsure.

"We never did have no trail to it. We came all the time different ways, so no one could find the still," he says, squeezing though a laurel bush.

As he descends a narrow cove, he questions his memory, and when the branch at the bottom becomes deeper and the vegetation thicker, he decides he needs to cross over to the next cove. Thick stands of laurel and ivy slow him down as he walks back to the top of the ridge to start over again. This time he sidles down the right side of the ridge. As a slow falling mist turns to rain, he hears the murmur of the branch and knows he's in the right place this time.

He is as much at home in these woods as in his house. They have become his ancestral estate.

"Both of my grandpas used to make whiskey. My mother's father only had one arm and a big family to

Ralph at home with his still. Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

raise. He made whiskey to sell. Weren't anything else he could do. Whiskey-making was bred in me," he says, crouching under a low laurel bush as he leads the way to the first still site.

"My grandpa wasn't exactly a preacher, but he preached. He said whiskey was made to sell, not to drink. He kept it in an oil can. One day somebody came to buy some; he sent his kids down to pick up the liquor. They walked down the road, then turned in to the still to get it," says Ralph, a smile creasing his face. "They was walking back with the whiskey in the oil can when the sheriff stopped and asked if they wanted a ride. They looked at each other, then got in, and he dropped them right at the house.

"Whiskey-making come down on both sides of the family," he reiterates, standing beside the branch where his father taught him the craft.

An old wooden barrel sits deeply sunken in the ground, its metal band holding the pitted oak slats in place. Three feet away the furnace gapes open, rocks still firmly in place, and pit ready to be loaded with dried locust and chestnut sticks. Beside the furnace the branch slips through the tangled roots of a large oak tree. Lower down in the clear water lies the top of an old aluminum coffee pot.

"I'd make coffee. Yep, I spent many a night right here. This was the first one where I worked with my pap. My old barrel has about rotted out. See—that would make it work better, to be buried like this," he says, pointing under a drooping rhododendron branch, its leaves hanging over the barrel.

Looking around, he discovers a glass gallon jug with a piece broken out of it. He looks at the jug and points to a flat spot above the barrel.

"I'd lay my jugs out right here under the rhododendron."

He sets the jug by the barrel, then tells how a bear once got into the full barrel, making a mess of things. Ralph decided to solve the problem.

"I put a piece of meat in the barrel and rigged a shotgun. I ran a string from the meat to the trigger and set the gun right here, pointing through this hole."

That night, he became worried that someone might stumble onto the gun and get hurt, so the next morning he hurried down to the still. He found the gun had been set off.

"That bear never did come back again," he says, then laughs.

He abandoned this spot because someone stumbled upon it and poured baking soda into his still.

When he next fired it, foam came pouring out, and he lost the whole run.

He moved down the branch to a neighbor's abandoned site from years gone by and set up the still that he worked until he gave up on whiskey.

Fighting his way down through the heavy laurel thickets to the site is difficult. His boots slip on the wet bank and sink into the soggy soil by the creek. A man would need a purpose to bring him through this maze of vegetation, steep banks, and moss-covered rocks. After several rough minutes, he sees the plastic pipe in the branch, then steps into the small clearing where the still sits.

"Well, about like I left it, ain't it," he says in wonder.

Walking behind his copper still, he runs his hand lovingly over the tarnished metal. He looks around to see his barrel buried in the ground, two washtubs—one for cooking the mash, the other for cooling his worm—a shovel, a hoe, and his bow saw leaning on the furnace where he left the handy tool those many years ago.
The only thing missing is the worm, the coiled copper pipe where steam changed into whiskey. He carried that crucial piece of equipment home with him when he left the still for the last time.

"A whiskey-making person always carried the worm home when he finished a run; that way no one

Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

could come use his still," he says. "Now I kept this thing shiny, like a new penny. I called her 'Ole Betsy.'

"B_ [he begins to say a name but thinks better of it]—a man made this copper still. I bought the sheets of copper, and he made it for me. You've got to use brass rods to do your welding with, or it'll be poison," he says, picking up the thump keg and placing it on a rock where it stood in the past. If he had brought his worm, he'd be back in business.

Carrying the worm, carrying 50-pound sacks of sugar and meal and lugging out several gallon jugs of whiskey in a sack, the glass carefully wrapped in cloth to prevent noise and breakage, kept the whiskey maker in good physical condition.

"There's a lot of work in making whiskey. A lazy man cannot make liquor; it's too much work in it."

As wind stirs the trees, he looks up into the forest's crown where raindrops drip from summer's green leaves. The laurel thicket shelters the still in dusky gloom this morning.

"When you make your best whiskey is when the poplar leaves gets about the size of squirrel ears. And be sure to bury your barrels about half way."

Over the years Ralph made many runs of whiskey here but never sold the pure spirits. His non-commercial approach kept him out of jail. But he freely shared the liquor with his friends and drank it himself.

"Good white whiskey—you get drunk the night before and wake up the next day feeling fine. You can go on in to work. I used honey one time instead of sugar, but with that, you'd get up the next morning and take a dipper of water, then you'd be just as drunk as you was the night before. I couldn't take that."

He had read once that the kings of England made their liquor that way and he wanted to try it.

In a reversal of the Rip Van Winkle story, an older Ralph has returned to find the place sleeping peacefully, pretty much as he left it, although the copper has dimmed and the barrels have slowly rotted. He bustles around, hooking up the thump keg, setting the plastic pipe in the branch to get water running.

"I get excited just thinking about it," he says as he kneels down by the furnace. "You got to have a splitter—a piece of tin. You put it agin the still, bend it in a 'v'; it splits the fire. If you don't have a splitter, all the heat hits on the front. You need to spread it around."

He reaches over to set up a washtub. It's clear he'd love to practice his craft one more time.

"I'd take my meal—twenty-five pounds of meal—put it in this two-bushel tub with it half full of water and build a fire under it until it's boiling, really flopping. Then cool it off with water until it was a little over lukewarm, and then put it in the oak barrel. Then you put in your sugar, then malt on top to smother it down.

"Now, some people put in yeast, but that will give you a headache. You let fermenting take place on its own; that's why the barrel is buried. Let it ferment seven days. One way to tell it's ready is you'll see big clear spots the size of silver dollars on top."

He rubs his hands together, then continues: "You dip the mash into the still, and you're ready for a run. Start the fire, get it boiling. Don't cap it until it's boiling good."

Ralph demonstrates how he set the cap on the still and sealed it with paste made from meal and water. He also sealed the connections to the thump keg.

"You feel the pipe until it's warm," he says, placing his fingers on the tube connecting the still to the thump keg. "Put your backings in the thump keg. When it starts thumping, you got your worm in here. (He indicates the second wash tub where he has placed the plastic pipe with water running from the branch.) Next thing you know, whiskey will start coming out the worm. I'd always catch it in glass jugs. Look to see when the beads will go straight to the bottom—before that they'll look like bullfrog eyes on top of the liquor. When the beads go down, move the jug away and cap it. I'd get six gallons out of one barrel.

"I tried to keep mine around 120 to 130 proof. A lot of folks watered theirs down, but I wouldn't."

Even though Ralph retired long ago, his fame remains in his community.

"There've been several wanted me to show them how to make whiskey, but I wouldn't. There's two things I think I saw the end of on Jonas Ridge. I was the last one to plow my garden with horses, and I was the last one to make whiskey."

The old still looks light blue after more than twenty years of neglect, but Ralph thinks he could clean it up with some Brasso and a good scrubbing. The temptation is there, more from a desire to practice his craft than to quench a twenty-year thirst. But Ralph knows Dawn is in heaven, waiting for him. He plans to join her there. ❖

Michael Joslin lives with his wife, Pam, on a farm in the Buladean community of Mitchell County, North Carolina.

PORCH SPIRIT

PEGGY DOUGLAS

Mama twists her hair as she skims
Life magazine and occasionally sips
Jim Beam on ice, alternating among pleasures
with one free hand. Fingers of the other
stretch like baby robin necks for a second
coat of Pink Sapphire, delicately painted
across press-on nails with my tiny brush.
We heave a careless sigh, in unison,
as if trouble had finally lost its voice
on a red-hot summer night.

I watch her willowy fingers turn each page
and pause to close my eyes, as if darkness
could freeze a moment like this
and fetch him home again.
Shuffle, kick, flatfoot stomp,
a slow start before cutting loose,
head rolling from side to side,
my Daddy's face filled with fever,
dancing to beat the devil.

Peggy Douglas lives in Knoxville, Tennessee. Her poems have appeared in several literary journals and anthologies including *The Light of Ordinary Things* (Fearless Books).

LATTER-DAY CORN LIKKERS

HANNA RASKIN

Corn liquor cocktails aren't big sellers in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"Whiskey drinks are hard enough for people to go for," sighs Justin Crawford, who masterminded the seriously swanky drink list at Nova, a small plates spot in downtown Asheville, North Carolina. "And then when you get into the whole unaged thing, it just hasn't taken hold here."

Farther down the street, the barkeep at Mo' Daddy's—a blues club where the edible odes to the South include platters of fried chicken and bacon aplenty—is stuck with a stash of Georgia Moon, the cutely-jarred straight corn whiskey from Heaven Hill Distilleries. The eatery's "Moonshine Martini," garnished with pickled okra, slipped off the cocktail menu a few months after its debut.

But beyond the boundaries of Appalachia, affixing the word "moonshine" to a mixed drink is a sure way to attract customers' attention: Bartenders from New York City to San Francisco are increasingly tinkering with Southern-style clear whiskies that previous generations would have dismissed as hooch. While western North Carolinians are apparently still immune to the sense of novelty and romance that "moonshine" conjures on either coast, leading distillers and mixologists believe pure corn is poised to reappear in the mainstream Appalachian liquor cabinet as a premium cocktail ingredient.

"Bartenders like having new stuff to work with, and a neutral product is so easy to use," enthuses Paul Zablocki, a Brooklyn-based cocktail writer who maintains the Cocktail-buzz blog with his partner Steve Schul.

Moonshine has never gone away, of course. As scholars like Matthew Rowley have shown, moonshine's easy to find just about anywhere folks drink. Notwithstanding the protestations of legendary shiners like Popcorn Sutton, who took his life in 2009 after being sentenced to eighteen months in prison for illegally making liquor, the nation's bathtub gin tradition is hardly endangered. Indeed, the prevalence of home distilling in the mountains may account for some locals' lack of enthusiasm for the corn whiskey genre, since

Photo courtesy Piedmont Distillers.

they've often tasted their share of badly made stuff.

But if mountain imbibers can overcome their resistance to what straight whiskey drinkers dismissively refer to as "frou-frou drinks"—"In Appalachia, there remains a strong preference for white liquor to remain white, without additions of fruit purees, fancy foams, and spices nobody's heard of," Rowley writes—the region could prove fertile ground for the burgeoning corn liquor cocktail scene, which is situated at the nexus of three major trends: the resurgence of serious bartending; the local foods craze; and the sudden uptick in microdistilling, made possible by the loosening of restrictions governing the production of spirits.

The state of Tennessee, where distilling has long been legal in just three counties, made headlines in the summer of 2009 by allowing spirits distillation in forty-four counties. The new law should spur the creation of craft distilleries across the state—or so hope the legislators who passed the bill, promising jobs and new tax revenue.

The problem is that unlike microbrewing, which is so simple to master that homebrew kits routinely surface on wedding registries and beneath Christmas trees, above-board microdistilling requires extravagantly expensive equipment and a fearsome amount of legal paperwork. Distilling spirits is a costly endeavor that only the most highly capitalized entrepreneurs are likely to pursue.

"It's very, very expensive," confirms Larry Kass, spokesman for Heaven Hill. "And if you want to age your product, you can't even sell it for a few years."

Kass and other observers suspect that many microdistillers, eager to recoup their initial investments, will rush to turn out unaged spirits such as straight corn whiskey. Like bourbon and Tennessee whiskey, corn whiskey is an officially-designated American straight whiskey that must be made according to certain specifications: Its mash must consist of at least eighty percent corn, and it can't be aged in charred white oak barrels. In other words, it's pretty much the product that most moonshiners make. And bartenders may soon be facing a glut of it.

Up near the northern tip of the Appalachian region, the artisanal distillery Tuthilltown Spirits is already making Hudson New York Corn Whiskey, which the company's website describes as "clear and soft to the tongue, with the faint aroma of corn fields at harvest." Tuthilltown distiller Gable Erenzo says the whiskey has found fans among maverick mixologists.

"Bartenders are using it to add a whole new dimension to their cocktails," he says.

At this year's Tales of the Cocktails, the annual mixology geekfest in New Orleans, Erenzo and Scott Beattie, author of *Artisanal Cocktails: Drinks Inspired by the Seasons* (Ten Speed Press, 2008), unveiled a highly-acclaimed negroni made with corn whiskey instead of gin. According to Erenzo, the concoction worked partly because tipplers appreciated the paean to domestic spirits.

"It resonates as an American staple," Erenzo says. "Corn whiskey's been with us since the beginning."

While corn liquor is a worthy substitute for gin or vodka—Erenzo's lately been promoting a recipe for

"Corn on the Collins"—it also works in place of aged whiskies. Erenzo reports bartenders are "supplementing or half-supplementing" the bourbon or rye in classic cocktails like the Manhattan.

Many of the mixologists working with the spirits made by Piedmont Distillers, the Madison, North Carolina, outfit that's been producing Junior Johnson's Midnight Moon since 2007, have been considerably less

The Kitty Carlisle. Photo courtesy Piedmont Distillers.

restrained in their experimentation. Johnny Williams, resident mixologist at Raleigh's Solas, last year took second-place honors in a drink contest sponsored by the local alt-weekly with "Cardinal Sin," combining Piedmont's flavored Catdaddy Carolina Moonshine, Cheerwine, tupelo honey, Riesling, and blackberry puree. At New Orleans' The Green Goddess, Catdaddy is teamed up with lychee and spicy ginger syrup for a "See Rock City! Julep." Clearly, corn whiskies are no longer "all about yeehaw," as Kass says—even if some snazzy San Francisco bars persist in showcasing unaged spirits on "Hillbilly Nights."

But there wasn't any irony in Zablocki and Schul's embrace of Piedmont's portfolio: "We fell in love with the products," Zablocki says. They were recruited this year to create a flight of "moonshine" drinks for a special event at Tales of the Cocktail.

"We used basil, a little salt, and tomato juice," Zablocki says of "The Adam," made with Midnight Moon. "It was almost like drinking water."

Kass is confident that corn whiskey will inspire still more creativity behind the bar in coming years.

"People used to dabble in it, but now that there are more of these brands, more people are doing stuff with them," he says. "Mixologists being a resourceful lot, they're finding some interesting things to do." ❖

These cocktails were created by award-winning mixologists Paul Zablocki and Steve Schul of cocktailbuzz.com. Paul and Steve are from Brooklyn, New York.

The Kitty Carlisle

3/4 ounce Catdaddy Carolina Moonshine
3/4 ounce bourbon
3/4 ounce white crème de cacao
3/4 ounce lemon juice

Shake for 30 seconds in an ice-filled shaker. Strain into a chilled coupe or cocktail glass.

The Kitty Hawk

1 ounce gin
1 ounce Catdaddy Carolina Moonshine
1/2 ounce lemon juice
2 teaspoons maraschino liqueur
1 teaspoon crème de violette
Brandied cherry

Shake with ice and strain into a chilled cocktail glass or coupe. Garnish with cherry.

The Catbird Seat

1 1/2 ounces cognac or brandy
1 1/2 ounces Catdaddy Carolina Moonshine
1/2 ounce lemon juice
Unrefined cane sugar

Shake in ice and strain into cocktail glass or coupe half-rimmed with sugar.

Hanna Raskin is food editor for the *Mountain Xpress* in Asheville, North Carolina, and serves as Southern food correspondent for *AOL Food*.

A WILD FRONTIER OF WINE:
VISITING THE VINEYARDS OF NORTH GEORGIA

RANDY HARBER

Not that many decades ago, bootleggers and moonshiners blitzed like thunder down the roads of the Appalachian foothills of North Georgia. They carried loads of fruit jars brimming with white lightning, trying their best to outrun the law. Today, a journey at a more leisurely pace through those green vales provides the visitor with an opportunity to taste beverages far more sublime—dozens of world-class wines made by Georgia winemakers.

Back in the early 1980s, when people who are still the pioneers of Georgia wine making began planting vineyards, the question was whether you could make wine in Georgia at all. Now, almost three decades later, and with new vineyards being planted every year, the sheer number of vintages as well as the bevy of medals won by Georgia wines have laid that question to rest.

For a time, the breadth and quality of Georgia wines were the region's best-kept secrets. That is changing dramatically as wine lovers discover the vintages in their own backyard. When you talk to Georgia winemakers these days, there is a sense of excitement in their voices, an expectation that a big breakout is about to occur.

"Where we are, if you want to compare us, is about where the Napa Valley was in 1975 or 1976," said David Harris, owner and winemaster at Blackstock Vineyards in Dahlonega.

The similarities between Georgia now and Napa then are striking. The majority of Georgia's vineyards, just as they were in Napa, are owned by families. Production is still relatively small but growing. Distribution is still a challenge. There is support from state and local governments, but it's small. Winemakers are each finding their own ways forward, many relying on traditional Bordeaux varieties; others looking to make wines with hybrids and native grapes.

But uniformly, the winemakers are crafting vintages that are approachable, food-friendly, and reflective of the unique characteristics of the region. In fact, Georgia winemakers have virtually stopped talking about whether they can make world-quality wines. They have begun discussing how to promote their wines as "East Coast" or "Eastern Seaboard" vintages that are unique to a wine region stretching from Virginia through North Carolina into the hills of North Georgia.

And they are all hoping there is another similarity

Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

between Napa of 1976 and Georgia now. In 1976, Napa wines reached a new level of maturity and visibility. That year two vintages—a 1973 Stag's Leap cabernet and a 1973 Chateau Montelena chardonnay—won a blind tasting in Paris. That victory, which came to be known as "The Judgment of Paris," shocked the wine world and put Napa wines on the map forever.

Georgia winemakers say they aren't there yet, but it's evident they think they could be, with a vintage that, perhaps, is already in the barrel or in the bottle.

What can we grow?

When prospective winemakers began planting new vineyards, there were questions about what would grow in North Georgia.

"When my husband and I came up here, we weren't sure what we'd get," said Cydney Kritzer of Frogtown Cellars in Dahlonega.

The biggest question was whether they could successfully grow vinifera grapes. Vinifera is the family of grapes that includes the famous varieties in France's world-renowned, chateau-bottled Bordeaux wines: cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, and merlot.

The answer was an emphatic "yes." The valleys of North Georgia feature cool summer nights, a warm, long growing season, and a mix of soils and minerals that have proved right on target for producing vinifera varieties.

But unlike France, where government regulation dictates the grape varieties that can be used in a region's wines, there are no such laws in Georgia.

Chardonnay and viognier, the Portuguese touriga national, the Italian sangiovese, and German riesling are popular with Georgia wine growers. Then come lesser-known European varieties like malbec, mouverdre, tannat, and petite manseng.

Native grapes and hybrids are not to be left out either. Seyval blanc, traminette, chardonel, and cabernet Norton are common.

And then there is the muscadine, a grape that produces a wine dear to the hearts and palates of people all across the South.

The "East Coast" or "Eastern Seaboard" Style Wines

Knowing that North Georgia's growing season allowed them to do pretty much whatever they wanted, wine growers took a variety of approaches. While the wines being made now are as different as the winemakers, the location of the vineyards and the types of soil—the *terroir* in French wine terms—all point to a common style. The question becomes, "What is that 'East Coast style wine' that Georgia makers are talking about?"

Perhaps the best way to begin is to say what an East Coast-style wine is not. The common opinion among Georgia growers seems to be that it isn't Napa and it isn't Bordeaux.

"What I have seen with a lot of people starting up is that they want to have a Napa cabernet. What you have to get your mind around is that you aren't going to have a Napa cabernet sauvignon," said Eric Seifarth, owner and winemaster at Crane Creek Vineyards in Young Harris. "We're going to be more like Burgundy, lighter with more minerals."

Other Georgia vintners agree. "We are not California and we are not Bordeaux," said Kritzer from Frogtown Cellars. "Our wines are not as fruit-forward as California. They have more structure, like Bordeaux but not Bordeaux. We are more subtle, in between."

An indicative but hardly exhaustive look at some of Georgia's tastiest reds begins with family blends and reserves.

Rabun Red 2006, Tiger Mountain Vineyards—This big red starts out like a Cotes du Rhone, but instead of syrah, the predominant grape used by owner and winemaker John Ezzard is cabernet Norton. The wine is medium-bodied, with pepper, fruit flavors, and deep tannins, but the Norton gives it a unique twist. Every Rabun Red has that *raison sauvage* or brambly wild grape edge reminiscent of the way American zinfandels tasted when they were first introduced. How does it pair with food? Great with a big slab of prime rib.

Propaganda 2005, Frogtown Cellars—Cydney Kritzer says this is her favorite as the weather cools. It's a Bordeaux-style blend with fruit, structure, and hints of leather. Drink it just as you would a Bordeaux red, with roasts or as a foil for pungent cheeses.

2006 Claret, Wolf Mountain Vineyards—Winner of a gold medal from the American Wine Society, this wine is a blend of cabernet sauvignon and mouverdre. Complex but smooth with deep fruit flavors, it pairs well with a hearty beef bourguignon or a plate of smoky pulled pork.

ACE—A Family Reserve 2004, Blackstock Vineyards—When asked what an East Coast wine would

taste like, David Harris answers with this vintage. "Our greatest hope is that we could make a wine that could not be had from some other region," he said. ACE, which gets its name from the initials of each of Harris' three children, is a blend of touriga national, mouverdre, and a touch of merlot. "It has a bit of green olives," he says. This wine begins with fruit and ends with a sort of lush complexity laced with spice. Perfect with roasts or hearty stews, it also plays well off a plate of toasted pecans and blue cheese.

While the catalogue of Georgia wines is too large to include here, others to consider are the region's rosés. Crane Creek makes one from the Villard Noir grape.

"The goal is to sell enough wine and not have to sell food."

Blackstock makes its from sangiovese. Wolf Mountain makes a traditional southern Rhone Valley-style rosé. All three of these dry wines work well with dishes like roast duck served on a summer evening.

Most of the Georgia wineries produce a dry chardonnay and a voignier. Among the varietals, cabernet franc is also a favorite along with cabernet Norton. And there are always surprises. Sharp Mountain Vineyard at Ellijay is unique in producing pinot noir and gewürztraminer. Persimmon Creek Vineyards near the North Carolina line stands alone with its riesling and late harvest riesling.

All Georgia wineries are offering a wide selection of varietals. Not to be forgotten is Habersham Winery's white muscadine with its complex taste of sweetness balanced with acid. While many people use white muscadine as a dessert wine, Steve Gibson of Habersham says it matches well with spicy south Asian dishes like Thai or Indian curries.

Come Meet the Winemakers

At this stage of the Georgia wine industry's growth, a visitor can stop at any one of the wineries on any given day and most likely meet the owners or winemakers.

"People love to meet the owners," said Martha Ezzard of Tiger Mountain. "They want to hear the stories about how we got started and how the wines are made. That's one of the reasons we keep our vineyards open all year. We tell people, pack a picnic basket and come see our vineyards."

To make ends meet, Georgia wineries have adopted a number of strategies. They sell fruit to other wineries, run tasting rooms, and sponsor wine clubs and festivals. Many wineries serve meals, host weddings, and stage events. Others have built cabins where visitors can stay.

"The goal is to sell enough wine and not have to sell food," said Cydney Kritzer of Frogtown Cellars. "But right now that's not the way to make a living."

The principal problem for most Georgia winemakers is that there just aren't enough hours in a day. In addition to planting and tending vineyards, making wine, and staging events, there is the question of distribution.

Production from Georgia vineyards, according to figures from the University of Georgia, ranges from 1,000 cases a year to more than 15,000. Under Georgia law, a farm winery can distribute its own wine, but as Seifarth from Crane Creek wryly notes, "That means you have got to do it yourself."

That's pretty much what John and Martha Ezzard at Tiger Mountain have done. Martha notes that their wines are available now in over 130 locations, including every major city in Georgia and in Atlanta's top restaurants.

"We have good friends in a lot of places who have had wine tastings. We have just personally taken the time to go," Martha said. Tiger Mountain, whose production is now over 3,000 cases, had about 2,000 visitors to the winery in 2008 and has now signed up with an Atlanta distributor.

At Persimmon Creek Vineyards, Sonny and Mary Ann Hardman have focused on getting their wines into high-end restaurants across the state to raise visibility for their vineyard, nestled between lakes Burton and Rabun in Rabun County.

Frogtown Cellars is planning new tasting rooms at Helen in the Georgia mountains and at Hahira in south Georgia.

Habersham Winery, whose production tops 15,000 cases a year, has three distributors covering all of Georgia, according to Steve Gibson. This allows him to focus on Habersham's tasting rooms at Helen and at Juliette in middle Georgia.

Frogtown, Wolf Mountain, Three Sisters, and Blackstock, all in Dahlonega, have elaborate photo spreads on their websites depicting weddings at their vineyards. Each has a calendar packed with events.

At Crane Creek, where production has topped 5,000 cases a year, Seifarth has worked toward making his winery a destination. In addition to the tasting room, the winery hosts events like the monthly "Wine for Women," and there are cabins to rent on the winery property. Adding cabins and a tasting room has been a strategy for Persimmon Creek as well.

Two other factors have also kept Georgia winemakers smiling: the locavore movement aimed at eating and drinking locally and, ironically, the downturn in the national economy.

Not only are Georgia distributors now interested in carrying one or more Georgia wines, grocery store chains like Whole Foods and Publix have started adding them to their inventories.

Seifarth describes North Georgia as an alternative to Napa. "We are in one of the most beautiful regions you can find," he said. "With the economy the way it has been, I would say to people in Atlanta, 'You don't have to spend the money to go to California. Come and see us.'"

And apparently that's what people are doing in ever-growing numbers.

"Our revenues are up," said Martha Ezzard of Tiger Mountain, noting the steady stream of people touring the Georgia mountains.

And what are the prospects? At the moment, said Cydney Kritzer of Frogtown, people in Atlanta haven't "known we were here, but that is changing. In ten years, you won't recognize Dahlonega."

Eric Seifarth at Crane Creek said the biggest challenge for all Georgia winemakers is to manage growth. "I think you are going to see a dramatic change in the next seven to eight years. The number of wineries is probably going to double and that's fine. The wine industry loves company."

David Harris from Blackstock says it best: "We are in a land of milk and honey. It's a wild frontier out there with lots of challenges. This is a fun, exciting way to make a living."

For more information on Georgia vineyards and wineries, check these websites: www.georgiawine.com or www.georgiawinecountry.com. ❖

Randy Harber, a veteran journalist who has written, edited, and traveled for CNN for almost thirty years, has family roots in the hills of North Georgia. A lover of wine, food, and those things that make for a good life, he records his adventures in his blog, www.fireandhearth.blogspot.com. He and his wife, Kathy, live in Atlanta. This is his first appearance in *Now & Then*.

Photo courtesy Larry Smith.

HOME IS WHERE THE RIVER SINGS

- for Te-lah-nay, Woman with the Dancing Eyes

IRENE LATHAM

Not in the white man's camp where they hung
a number around my neck and pinned two bells to my dress

Not in the big canoe where they herded
us like sheep and fed us beans and dry bread

Not at Johnson's Landing where we fell in line
behind the second wagon and began to walk

Not in Memphis where boats bleated
and people bellowed, the river a hissing snake

Not in the Indian Nations of Oklahoma where I mixed
spider web and red root, healed headaches and eyes

And when I escaped, not anywhere my feet landed
the long journey back: not Hot Springs, Arkansas,

not Holly Springs, Mississippi, not the Devil's Backbone.
No, home is here, in the shoulderbone of the Tennessee River

where mussels hide in the sandy shallows,
where the Woman in the River serenades the lonely

and the Breathmaker watches as my great-great-grandson
sets stones in a wall, one for each of my steps.

Irene Latham is the author of *What Came Before*, a collection of poems, and *Leaving Gee's Bend*, a novel. She is poetry editor for *Birmingham Arts Journal.*

WITH GRATITUDE TO LINDA PARSONS MARION

MARIANNE WORTHINGTON

After fourteen years of bringing splendid poetry to *Now & Then* readers, Linda Parsons Marion has retired as poetry editor. Linda was invited to take the position after she won first place and an honorable mention in the 1994 *Now & Then* poetry contest. She began her official duties with the "Discovering Appalachian Music" issue in 1995.

Linda's list of honors includes two literary fellowships from the Tennessee Arts Commission, a Pushcart Prize nomination, and poetry publications in national literary journals and anthologies. Her work has been featured in two academic collections on women writers: *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia* and *Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Appalachian Women's Poetry*.

Many of Linda's prize-winning poems have been collected in her two volumes of poetry, *Home Fires* (1997) and *Motherland* (2008), which have inspired emerging and established poets. Sylvia Woods, poet and teacher at Tennessee's Oak Ridge High School, said, "Last year, one of my students so loved *Motherland* that she memorized one of the poems. She had recently lost her mother, and these poems spoke to her with such intensity she wanted to keep it forever."

West Virginia poet Ron Houchin said Linda's "embrace of the divergent in poetry made *Now & Then* one of the first Appalachian literary magazines to ever accept my work. To her I am eternally grateful for entrance into a world where I never imagined I'd belong."

When asked what she believed was most rewarding about her work as poetry editor, Linda said, "I have loved pairing work from the very experienced, honored poets of our region with poets who hadn't yet published widely or were then unpublished—and seeing how all levels stood beautifully together. It's been a joy to watch the less experienced poets blossom and grow over time, knowing I would receive dependably fresh and wonderful poetry from them.

"I also loved seeing how the poems complemented the articles, often surprisingly so, adding another dimension of heart and voice to each issue of the magazine. I continue to be grateful that *Now & Then* believes in the power of poetry to 'sing the body Appalachia' to new and deeper places." ❖

Marianne Worthington is the new poetry editor for *Now & Then*. She also edited book reviews for this issue.

THE SPIRIT OF APPALACHIAN MUSIC LIVES ON IN THE *SONG OF THE MOUNTAINS*

WAYNE WINKLER

Curly Seckler with Constant Change. Photo courtesy Tim White.

The house lights are still on in Marion, Virginia's Lincoln Theatre as Tim White goes over a few instructions before the show begins. "No smoking, of course, in the theatre—no chewin', spittin', or cussin', none of that—behave yourselves! No flash photography—you can take pictures, but no flashes, please. No home videos or anything like that, and notice these cameras here—I'll tell you about those in a few minutes because you're gonna be on TV."

The audience obligingly applauds on cue for a few minutes for the TV cameras, and then White introduces Jett's Creek to kick off another taping of *Song of the Mountains*, the award-winning public television series produced in partnership with UNC-TV and aired on more than 160 public television stations nationwide. "We maybe make it look easy," White says. "It's not. We've just got a great team."

Song of the Mountains began with Tim White's devotion to the traditional music of Appalachia. The Roanoke native moved to Blountville, Tennessee, in 1974 and quickly discovered the newly-opened Carter Fold, the traditional music venue in Hiltons, Virginia (see *Now and Then*, Vol. 22, No. 2). "I guess the good Lord just sent me there," White recalls, "because I just fell in love with the music of southwestern Virginia, East Tennessee, western North Carolina, and southeastern Kentucky. I started learning the history of it. I picked up a five-string banjo in 1975 and started playing. I caught the bug."

The bug propelled Tim into the band Troublesome Hollow and into leading his own band, the VW Boys. It led him to host a bluegrass radio show and to help found the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance and the Appalachian Cultural Music Association. It inspired him to design and paint a 3-by-100-foot mural on State Street in Bristol, Tennessee, depicting Ralph Peer and the performers he recorded at his historic 1927 sessions, including Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter Family, and the Stonemans. And in 2005, the bug brought White to the Lincoln Theatre to produce *Song of the Mountains*. White began promoting bluegrass shows "out of the necessity of wanting to play more."

"Over the years I've promoted a lot of different shows—big shows, small shows. Sometimes you make a little money; most times you lose a little money." A format change brought an eleven-year stint on a local radio station to an end, and, as White says, "I can't sit still long, and I had a lot of folks who were tugging at me;

they said, 'Let's get something started with a non-profit [organization].'" He was then in the process of forming the non-profit Appalachian Cultural Music Association when he found the Lincoln Theatre.

The theatre was built in 1929 by Charles C. Lincoln, the wealthiest man in Marion. "Whatever he did, he did with great style and great flair," according to Joe Ellis, executive producer of *Song of the Mountains*, a software designer, and the owner of the Francis Marion Hotel next door to the theatre. Lincoln had built the elegant Francis Marion Hotel in 1928. Inspired by a theatre he had seen in Atlantic City, New Jersey, he hired that theatre's designers to create his movie palace. Unfortunately, Lincoln did not live to see his theatre built; he died of pneumonia after construction began and the theatre was completed under the supervision of his sons.

The spirit of C.C. Lincoln and his family is still felt in Marion, a town of slightly more than 6,300 people in Smyth County, Virginia. "The Lincoln family had a lot of industrial interests here, and they really felt that they should make Marion a place where people would want to live," says Duane Cregger, executive director of the theatre. "So they built not only the Lincoln Theatre but also the hotel and some large homes in the area. [Charles Lincoln] felt the theatre was something he could give back to the town."

Nearly a thousand people packed the theatre when it opened on July 1, 1929, with the Buddy Rogers-Nancy Carroll picture *Close Harmony*. For many in the audience, it was their first "talkie." The first feature-length film with sound, *The Jazz Singer*, had been released less than two years earlier. The theatre's Art Deco interior suggested a Mayan temple, with six enormous murals depicting national and local history.

The Lincoln presented not only the latest Hollywood films but also stars of the Grand Ole Opry, including Minnie Pearl, Ernest Tubb, Del Wood, Roy Acuff, the Stanley Brothers, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Stringbean, Little Jimmy Dickens, and Grandpa Jones. "We had Vaudeville shows," says Cregger. "Roy Rogers was on our stage in the '40s , with Trigger and Dale Evans. We had Lash LaRue. A lot of the big movie stars of the time would actually come through and make a stop at the Lincoln Theatre." But time—and television—took a toll on the old movie palaces across America.

"When I was in high school, the theatre was in very bad shape," recalls Ellis. The theatre closed in 1973 after forty-four years of operation, reopened briefly, then closed—seemingly for good—in 1977. By the time Ellis got involved with the theatre, the only stars to be seen there were viewed through the hole in the roof. The Lincoln Theatre Foundation acquired the building in the late 1970s, but the theatre was neglected until the 1990s. A regional industrial board raised almost half the money needed for restoration.

Tim White and friends on Song of the Mountains. *Photo courtesy Tim White.*

"I think that gave people a lot of confidence," Ellis says. Almost $2 million was raised, a modern lighting and sound system was installed, and each of the giant murals was removed and restored at a cost of $20,000 per painting. (Local artist Lola Poston was paid only $50 per painting to create them in 1929.) Seating capacity was reduced to 500, and hundreds of volunteers aided in the restoration. The Lincoln Theatre reopened in May of 2004.

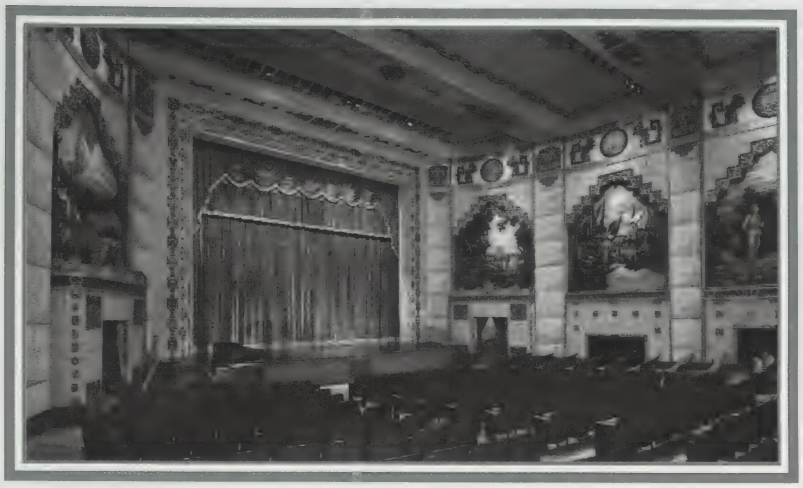
Prior to that reopening, however, Joe Ellis had another inspiration. He and a friend, James McNeil, were testing the suitability of the theatre for showing movies, and Joe moved into the balcony to see how the picture looked. The picture wasn't what they had hoped, but "when James turned on the single house light, I just kind of had a vision of a TV show on the stage. I saw a bluegrass band and TV cameras and a show going on. It was kind of the 'eureka' moment." Ellis met with some local businessmen and musicians to explore the possibilities.

"Joe Ellis and I got together through our doctor, Dr. Doug Pote, out of Glade Spring," recalls Tim White. "He kept telling me, 'You need to meet this guy Joe Ellis. He's involved with the Lincoln Theatre.' I made a mental note of that and lo and behold, in the next year I was over here and I met Joe in the lobby and he started telling me about this idea of wanting to do the TV show on public

NOTES

television. He wanted to know if I'd come to a meeting or two. We met with Blue Ridge Public Television out of Roanoke, Virginia, and did a couple of pilot episodes in 2005. It's evolved into what it is today.

"But that first year, it was really, really tough. I called in favors, told people the dream, told them what we wanted to do, and I got a lot of good local and regional bands in to do season one. As soon as that started to hit nationwide on public television, then the phones started ringing."



Today White says the least of his problems is finding talent to appear on the show.

"When I met Tim White, I thought, 'This is it—this is the guy who can make this happen,'" says Ellis. "He can touch that vision; he can see it and hear it."

Andre Burroughs was the production manager at Blue Ridge Public Television when he was invited to some meetings with White and Ellis. He began producing and directing the television series for Blue Ridge Public Television. After two seasons, Burroughs encouraged them to buy their own equipment through grants from the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission. The Lincoln Theatre hired Burroughs to produce and direct the show, and it was distributed for a season by WCVE in Richmond. Now it's handled through UNC Television out of Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Burroughs says the independence of *Song of the Mountains* works out well for public television stations. "Budget cuts come up and they don't have the budget to do these types of shows. So a lot of PBS stations are getting producers from outside to bring them these shows, and all they have to do is be the presenting station—pay the few dollars for the captioning and the packaging of the tapes. So it kind of works out better for everybody."

"This theatre was built in 1929, and what sound reinforcement you had was very poor," says John Taylor, who handles the sound. But he praised the building's design. "You can put an acoustic guitar up there with one singer with no amplification and hear it everywhere in the theatre. The acoustics are that good."

When you suggest to Frank Carmack that the job of stage manager means doing whatever has to be done, he replies, "That's exactly right. Here's the checklist I follow; I guess it's about thirty-five lines long. We've developed it as we've done the show; [the checklist] is just to make sure we don't forget anything."

With twelve programs per year, the production staff has a month to get ready for each show. Performers submit a list of songs, detailing who will sing and who will take solos so camera shots can be planned. The schedule is set a year in advance.

"Every month we try to make improvements to the sound and the look," Carmack says. "We made our own music stands for the instruments that fit in with the scene because modern music stands look terrible onscreen. We use the carpet to tell [performers] where to stand, which makes it real easy to re-set the stage for each band."

On this Saturday night in May 2009, Jett's Creek leaves the stage, to be followed by Constant Change, a five-member bluegrass band from North Carolina. Comedian Gary Crain's impressions of celebrities like Jim Nabors and Walter Brennan are a hit with this audience, even though they might bewilder those born later than the Kennedy administration. More comedy ensues with the Tennessee Mafia Jug Band, veteran performers from Goodlettsville, Tennessee, who freely admit to having shamelessly stolen a feature of the old Roy Acuff Show, a bit known as "Pap and the Jug Band." They wear overalls, tell corny jokes, and commit various slapstick atrocities while performing old-time and country songs in jug-band style. Closing the show is bluegrass legend Curly Seckler, who has played with Charlie Monroe, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, the Stanley Brothers, the Sauceman Brothers, and many more, but who is probably best known for his longtime stint with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. It's a lot of entertainment for a fifteen-dollar ticket.

Photo courtesy the Lincoln Theatre, Marion, Virginia.

Song of the Mountains draws three or four hundred people to the Lincoln Theatre every month, and hundreds of thousands of public television viewers know about it. Joe Ellis sees the Lincoln Theatre, the Francis Marion Hotel, and the festival honoring author Sherwood Anderson (who once published the two newspapers in Marion) as "tourist magnets" for Marion and Smyth County. He expounds on "Joe's Theory of Tourism": "There are 13,000 McDonald's restaurants in the United States. Would you drive a hundred miles to see a McDonald's? You probably have one in your backyard. McDonald's is great, don't get me wrong, but you want something unique."

> ***"When I met Tim White, I thought, 'This is it—this is the guy who can make this happen,'" says Ellis. "He can touch that vision; he can see it and hear it."***

Tim White discussed plans to capitalize on the interest generated by *Song of the Mountains* with a *Song of the Mountains* museum highlighting traditional Appalachian music. "We've got a national brand with this show, now. We've got people who come from all over the country. Tonight we've got people from Arizona, from Utah—some of them make this a destination. And when they get here, we can teach them the history of the music and how it began—not only with our programming here on *Song of the Mountains* but also through that museum that's going to be right next to the theatre."

The Lincoln Theatre still reverberates with spirits—the spirit of Charles Lincoln, who commissioned its building; the spirit of Joe Ellis and the other citizens who worked to restore the Lincoln; the spirit of Tim White and the crew who put *Song of the Mountains* together. But there are other spirits haunting the Lincoln Theatre—the spirits of the entertainers, the movie stars, and musicians who performed on that historic stage.

"I'd never seen a ghost in my life until I came here," says stage manager Frank Carmack. "I believe I've seen 'em here. That's a different story for a different day, but—absolutely. I believe this theatre is listening to everything we do." ❖

Wayne Winkler is the manager of public radio station WETS-FM on the campus of East Tennessee State University.

MUSIC IN BRIEF

WAYNE WINKLER

Judy Wright
True to Myself
Baby Star Records

Judy Wright has worked in many musical genres, but with her 2007 self-titled release, she found the freedom of the Americana format was a perfect match for her spectacular voice. Terms such as "sultry," "hypnotic," "sexy," and "smoky" all fit but still fall short of describing her voice. Her latest release is appropriately titled *True to Myself* and represents a significant step forward for this extremely talented artist. Wright not only produced the album (with Bill Warner), she wrote or co-wrote every song except for the classic "Summertime," which receives a treatment that would make George Gershwin proud. Many of the songs are introspective and even sad (such as "I Just Need to Be Sad"), but the overall effect is soulful and uplifting. ❖

Various Artists
Appalachia: Music from Home
Lonesome Records

The recent PBS series *Appalachia: A History of Mountains and People* could easily have warranted a simple soundtrack album, but the producers wanted something more. They got it. *Appalachia: Music from Home* is a twenty-song collection that, as producer Ron Short says, "represents only a very small sampling of the huge body of Appalachian music." But that small sampling demonstrates the rich musical heritage of the region. Meant to complement the PBS series, *Appalachia* features both classic recordings and new material. The collection opens with a piece that dispels any stereotypes of "Appalachian" music: Kenton Coe's classical composition "Prelude: Mountains." The rest of the disc mixes vintage recordings by historic performers with the new generation "whose voices and talents are just being recognized," as Short says. Dock Boggs' "Coal Creek March" and Carl Martin's "Let's Have a New Deal" reflect not only the older Appalachian music but also African-American influences vital to it. Native American music is represented by the Seneca Singers' "Corn Dance." Newer stars such as James Alan Shelton, Darrell Scott, and Blue Highway present a variety of traditional songs from the region, and relative newcomers such as the Midnight Ramblers and fifteen-year-old Molly Slemp demonstrate that this musical tradition is still vital and growing. No single CD—or even a multi-disc collection—could represent the musical diversity of Appalachia, but this collection is an excellent starting point. ❖

The Stonemans
Patsy, Donna, & Roni
Patuxent Music

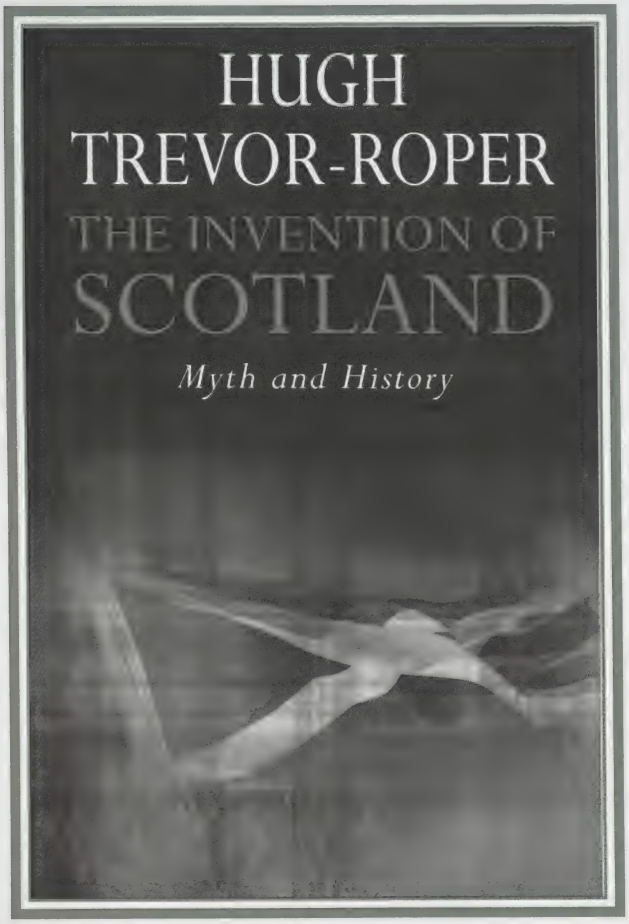
The Stonemans are among the pioneers of country music. Ernest "Pop" Stoneman had recorded country music as early as 1924 and guided Ralph Peer to Bristol, Tennessee, for the legendary 1927 sessions with the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. Pop Stoneman died in 1968, but his children continued to make music, appearing on television and even hosting their own syndicated program. A large family, the Stonemans often appeared in various combinations, with as many as six or seven "Stoneman" bands performing simultaneously. Today, only three daughters are left to carry on that family tradition. Veronica "Roni" Stoneman is probably the best-known sister from her days on *Hee Haw*, but all three obviously possess the Stoneman family gene that creates great music. Patsy kicks off the disc with the song that began the Stoneman family career, "The Sinking of the Titanic," and her autoharp and vocals are also featured on Stoneman classics such as "The Birds Are Returning" and her own autobiographical "Prayers and Pinto Beans." Donna Stoneman's mandolin is featured throughout the disc, particularly on her own composition, "Scotty's Bow." Roni Stoneman performs a song her father recorded several times, "Remember the Poor Tramp Has to Live," as well as the bluegrass standards "Ruby" and "Shackles and Chains." The daughters have their own unique styles, but when they perform together, it is evident that the Stoneman musical tradition lives on. ❖

Steve Earle
Townes
New West

Steve Earle's admiration for Townes Van Zandt, the legendary Texas singer and songwriter who died in 1997, is widely known. Like dozens of Texas songwriters, Earle lived in awe of Van Zandt's prodigious talent. He named his son Justin Townes, and in a famous quote for one of Townes' albums, Earle declares, "Townes Van Zandt is the best songwriter in the whole world and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in my cowboy boots and say that." Van Zandt's songs have been a regular part of Earle's on-stage repertoire for years, but with the release of *Townes*, Earle deals with songs that were at the core of his artistic being. As he told one reporter, "Every single one of these tracks, my heart rate went up when I did it. And I realized that of course I have an emotional stake in these songs—this is the reason I became a songwriter." Van Zandt's own albums often suffered from lackluster production, but Earle treats the songs as they deserve. With an all-star band including Tim O'Brien, Darrell Scott, Tom Morello (Rage Against the Machine, Audioslave), and Allison Moorer, familiar Van Zandt songs such as "Pancho and Lefty," "No Place to Fall," and "Marie" sound as fresh and vital as the man who wrote them at the peak of his powers. ❖

THE SPIRIT OF THE SCOTS:
SCOTLAND AND THE NEED FOR MYTHS

NED IRWIN



In Scotland, myths have often been as significant to its people as reality. British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, in the posthumously published *The Invention of Scotland* (Yale University Press, 2008), slays three such myths—about Scotland's founding, its literary heritage, and the tartan kilt.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as many European countries abandoned their myths, Scotland did the opposite. In 1707, Scotland was subsumed into Great Britain, and failed uprisings in 1715 and 1745 ended any further semblance of independence. For their own self-respect, the Scots needed to believe that in their past they had once been, and would be again, a great and vital people.

Led by historians John Fordun, Hector Boece, and George Buchanan, the Scots came to believe that theirs was a history far more ancient than either England or Ireland. This feat of historical legerdemain was accomplished by the creation of a mythology of Scottish history that encompassed seven centuries and forty kings. Names like Gaythelos and Hyber preceded real Scottish kings for whom we have an historical record. Such a lengthy heritage served two purposes. In the seventeenth century, it justified to the Scots their right to replace errant kings, since, in the beginning, the kings of Scotland were chosen by the people they ruled. And, after the union with England, having an illustrious history helped restore Scottish self-esteem, based on the belief that Scotland was once a much more advanced nation than England. There was one difficulty, though, with this early founding history: All of it was fabricated, and it remained in Scottish schoolrooms and history books well into the nineteenth century.

Having lost their political independence in 1707, the Scots were drawn to another myth for sustenance: literature and the seeming discovery, at mid-century, of a Celtic Homer. In 1760, a James Macpherson published *The Poems of Ossian*. He claimed to have saved these 9,000 lines of 1,500-year-old verse by finding a manuscript and an aged rural surgeon who had the text miraculously memorized. Recounting the story of an epic hero named Fingal, the poems came to be seen as the Celtic equivalent of the Greek writings of Homer. The poems fit perfectly with the Romantic movement then beginning

in Europe, which should have been a clue that they were contemporary, not ancient. Ossian's poetic epic swept not only Scotland but also the continent. Goethe was a fan, and Napoleon devoured it as a favorite reading.

Even the pointed attacks of Voltaire and Dr. Samuel Johnson failed to deflate the popularity of Ossian and Macpherson to the Scots. Eventually, the poetry was found to have been the modern fabrication of Macpherson, but it was no less appreciated by the Scots.

In collapsing this second Scottish myth, Trevor-Roper notes that "like Boece's kings and Buchanan's ancient constitution, Ossian's poems lost their authenticity, not when they were disproved, but when changing circumstances made them no longer necessary—and when another myth was available to supersede them."

As the Ossian spell was breaking, Sir Walter Scott was providing Scotland with its own native literature. And it was Scott who was a chief promoter of a third myth—that of the tartan kilt.

King George IV made a goodwill tour of Scotland in 1822, the first since the Stuart kings. Scott led the planning and preparation for the visit. His intent was to make it largely a Highland affair. In an earlier age, people in that region of the country had been viewed negatively, but by the time of the tour, they had been romanticized, largely through Scott's novels such as *Rob Roy*. Expecting many Highland chiefs and retainers in Edinburgh, the textile firm of William Wilson and Son of Bannockburn promoted the fashioning of tartan kilts to be worn for the festivities. The company even went so far as to design the patterns and publish a "Key Pattern Book." From this book, Highlanders could choose possible tartan patterns. For each clan chief, the firm suggested a pattern and the colors of the tartan, and the clans, having no existing tartans, generally accepted the suggestions of Wilson. The clan chief "certified" the tartan pattern for his clan. Thus, the idea of tartan patterns distinguishing the clans was largely a modern one.

The kilt itself was also a fairly modern form of dress created originally in 1727 by Thomas Rawlinson, an English Quaker industrialist. He designed the kilt "not in order to preserve a traditional [Scottish] way of life, but to ease its transformation from the heath into the factory." Before, the Highlander generally wore a long "Irish" shirt and a cloak. Following the failure of the uprising of 1745, the Scottish people were forbidden by law from wearing Highland dress, including the kilt. One exception was made: Regiments of the British Army raised in Scotland were permitted to wear it. The visit of George IV and his meeting with the Scottish clans proved the great impetus for fully reviving an interest in the kilt and the tartan fabrics from which it was made. As time went on, people came to accept the myth that the kilt was the age-old Scottish manner of dress and the tartan the native badge of honor.

These cases clearly illustrate Trevor-Roper's thesis that "the creation, and re-creation, of myth requires a continuing capacity for invention." Like Scotland, Appalachia has often found itself on the fringe of history, burdened by myths peculiarly its own. Trevor-Roper's book has implications for anyone studying or promoting regional identity. That is especially true of Appalachia, which, like Scotland, may be a more modern invention than we realize. ❖

Ned Irwin is an archivist with the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University.

Serena
by Ron Rash
Ecco/HarperCollins
New York, 2008
$24.95 (hardback), 371 pages

With all the skill of a writer and poet who has worked through his craft to maturity as epic narrator, and who knows greed and the havoc it has wrought upon Appalachia, author Ron Rash has created *Serena*, an American tale set in the time of the Great Depression.

Serena is the story of wealthy investors who come to Southern Appalachia in 1929 to harvest timber near Waynesville, North Carolina. More importantly, it is a tragic story of destruction—of land and of people. Investors buy the land, cut the timber, pollute the waters, and then leave. The people who work in destroying their own mountains are driven by poverty and despair.

Critics and novelists have hailed the prize-winning *Serena* as a contemporary classic and Rash as a major American novelist. The novel is worthy of such high acclaim, but undue focus has been placed on parallels to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Some have called *Serena* an Appalachian "retelling" of Shakespeare's tragedy of ambition; others have discussed the effectiveness of Rash's portrayal of Serena herself as a modern Lady Macbeth. However, such observations seem to belie the author's skilled blending of classic and Appalachian elements in creating a novel that is both timeless and timely.

While Rash does incorporate recognizable elements of classicism, and certainly Renaissance tragedy, ironic twists and sometimes playful departures from any one convention leave *Serena* an original. Time-transcendent motifs ground a novel written by an Appalachian, an American, for this generation. The result brings to mind Emerson's dictum that each generation, though respecting the classics, must write its own books.

Serena's power, as she emasculates her lust-sick husband, is akin to that of Faulkner's Flem Snopes. She never expresses an interest in a child beyond determination to produce an heir. Left scarred and barren, she moves on toward domination of Pemberton. Her sexuality never extends beyond the casting of her "spell" on the weak and sexually needy Pemberton, whom she seduces and marries with little effort. She has researched Pemberton before meeting him, finding in his wealth, reputation as a killer, and his interest in land speculation a man suited to her purpose. We are forewarned of his significance only as a tool for her greater ambitions by the ever-present massive Saratoga trunk which sits unopened and unexplained in their lumber camp bedroom. It holds her ambition, formulated before her acquaintance with Pemberton and awaiting, like Serena herself, a suitable means of moving toward greater goals.

Serena's need for control takes the form of grotesque intimate dominance over her slave, Galloway, whose life she has saved. Control over Galloway seems a twisted distortion and rejection of any emotional

connection. Her trained eagle, killing snakes native to the habitat, becomes a symbol of American destructive greed.

We are left to wonder about Serena's background as the one surviving daughter of a Colorado timber harvester, but we need see her only as she is: a woman with an aversion to discussing the past and with no sense of place. She perceives herself as a survivor, having survived illness and cheating fate by simply refusing to die. Ultimately she is a wandering mercenary whose restless greed takes her from Colorado to New England, North Carolina, and Brazil.

We struggle when our women protagonists stand alone and isolated as manipulators, driven by inexplicable forces to become the inexplicable force driving men and women to their fate. We are accustomed to defining our women characters in terms of their relationships with and attitudes toward men. Serena is without gender prejudice; she will use and destroy any man or woman who exists in opposition to her will. Hers is the force of superior intellect joined with amoral intent. Hawthorne's Ethan Brand could never match her hardened heart.

The lumber camp is populated by characters who are historically believable and yet recognizable in our time. The camp doctor, Cheney, waits for permission from the Pembertons to determine if a life is worth saving. Often it is not. The mother of Galloway speaks in the classic tradition of blind seers; her words, ambiguous and inspiring fear, anticipate the tragic and violent bludgeoning and deaths that permeate the novel. A powerful Celtic spirit of individualism and fatalism imbues a chorus of sawyers with visionary wisdom as they fell trees in steep ravines where Serena has ordered them to defy near-certain death for her profit. Here the men discuss the nature of life and God, their Appalachian voices serving as a chorus in the tradition of classic tragedy.

The novel's power largely comes from the author's understanding of ecological landscape and richness of language. As Rash has said, real writing is rewriting. That is evident in the exactitude of language throughout the novel. Rachel, a local girl drawn to Pemberton's charm and wealth, stands in contrast to Serena. In searching the creek for a replacement chimney stone, Rachel's understanding of her home is evident:

> Beard-tongue brightened the bank, and Rachel smelled the wintergreen odor of the blooms, the best kind of smell on a warm day because breathing it in seemed to cool you off from the inside out. . . . She gazed into the pool, seeing first her own reflection, below it tadpoles flowing across the creek's sandy bottom, like black tears. The kind of thing you could see as an omen, Rachel knew, but chose instead to see an omen in the blooming beard-tongue that had, like her, survived a hard winter.

Poetic language coupled by the author's own understanding of the western Carolina landscape make this novel linguistically delicious. ❖

Joyce Compton Brown is professor emeritus of English at Gardner-Webb University in North Carolina, where she still teaches occasionally.

The Motel of the Stars

by Karen Salyer McElmurray

Sarabande Books
Louisville, Kentucky, 2008
$15.95 (paperback), 256 pages

Karen McElmurray may be best known for her prize-winning memoir *Surrendered Child: A Birth Mother's Journey*. Her fiction, however, is also beautifully written and not to be missed. In her second novel, *The Motel of the Stars*, Jason Sanderson works as a repossession case manager in Eastern Kentucky. He is married to his second wife, Rosa, who is mostly kind to him and protective, albeit in a misguided sense. Rosa, for example, is introduced in the novel while planning a "celebration" of the anniversary of Jason's son's death, a tragic accident that has left Jason almost numb for the past ten years. Rosa's party leaves Jason questioning his life and the tenuous relationship he had with his late son, Sam.

Although unaware of it, Jason is not alone in being unable to move past Sam's death. Sam's girlfriend Lory Lewellen has also mourned for the past ten years. She and Sam traveled across the world, seeing some of the most distant and unique locations imaginable, searching for enlightenment as they roamed. After Sam's death, however, Lory returned to her step-father's motel, living a shadow of her former life. Her strongest connections to other humans come from the virtual world of Internet chat rooms, and the computer itself has replaced the experiences she once shared with Sam: "With a computer's power, she can travel to Asiatic islands for sunsets. . . . And the screen itself was a marvel of light. Contrast. Intensity. Gamma Rays. Brightness. Sometimes when she holds her hand like this, fingers extended and the blue screen light shining through, she feels the same amazement she'd felt long ago on a mountaintop."

These two individuals have quit living because of their common loss. Having met only once, before Sam's death, Jason and Lory have a chance second meeting at the Motel of the Stars.

The story is set in 1997, the ten-year anniversary of a planetary alliance known as the Harmonic Convergence. Following vastly different paths, both Jason and Lory are led to a celebration of the event at Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina, where the two eventually find each other and a sense of enlightenment. In finding each other, they move toward the future for the first time since Sam's death.

The anticipation of the Harmonic Convergence pulsates throughout the book. It is both scientific and spiritual, and McElmurray comes at it from both angles.

Lory remembers the 1987 Harmonic Convergence she attended with Sam:

> We are all parts of God from time upon time, they said. She remembers love beads and prayer wheels and tee shirts with rainbows. She remembers Sam Sanderson, how he once filled her heart like firelight. That night ten years ago, they planned to to go to the top of Grandfather Mountain: Harmonic Convergence. When it came back, the original face of God, would it come back like a flash of light?

Light and fire in their various forms are used throughout the book to connect the narrative, and McElmurray precedes each chapter with a scientific fact or definition of some elemental force.

Tying everything together is Sam, always the proverbial rolling stone, traveling the globe, looking for peace after his mother's death. Even in death, he exemplifies the universal search for satisfaction, fulfillment, understanding, love. Centering on these basic human desires, McElmurray finds the universality of her story.

The Motel of the Stars is the perfect combination of new-age beliefs and ancient mysticism, set solidly in the mountains of contemporary Appalachia. McElmurray's knowledge and understanding of the region are clear and never stereotypical, particularly in her language and use of dialogue. Neither is McElmurray's Appalachia separated or cut off from the rest of the world. Indeed, it is one of the truest depictions of the region in modern literature.

Some readers will wish for a stronger, more definitive resolution, but the novel, like life, is about the search for answers—not the answers themselves. ❖

Denton Loving is a fiction writer who lives on a farm near the historic Cumberland Gap. His work has appeared in *Birmingham Arts Journal, Appalachian Journal, Minnetonka Review,* and in numerous anthologies.

The Hurting Part:
Evolution of an American Play
by Silas House
MotesBooks
Louisville, Kentucky, 2008
$15.00 (paperback), 120 pages

Readers rarely have the opportunity to follow the winding path of the creation of a play, but this book by novelist and playwright Silas House opens the gate to this path. It begins with a story House was told every Christmas while wrapping gifts for his aunt. This story remained like a pebble imbedded in his brain that prodded him to write the short fiction piece, "An Unsent Letter." When he was later commissioned to write a play, he circled back to this family tale to create the stunning work *The Hurting Part.*

In addition to the play script and the short story "An Unsent Letter," this collection also includes an interview and House's essay "The Story of a Story." These elements strengthen the book and allow the reader to glimpse House's writing process and to see the challenges of transforming a piece of Appalachian oral history into a fictional story and eventually into a script.

The Hurting Part: Evolution of an American Play is filled with lessons for playwrights and teachers, demonstrating the opportunities available to writers when they choose to explore a story in different genres. When House undertook the dramatization of his fictional story "The Unsent Letter," he embraced the strengths of playwriting instead of trying to make the play conform to the structure of the original short story.

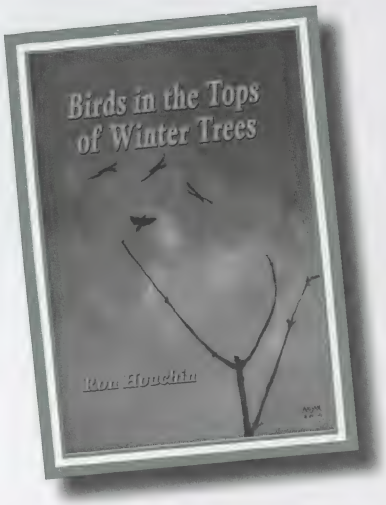
One of the changes he made from the short story was to allow the play to unfold in real-time as compared to the written letter format in "The Unsent Letter." He also introduced depth and dimension with the characters Patty and Darrell and their tragic story. In the play, main characters Thelma and Simeon are living in the North while their child is back home in the mountains with their family. The resulting displacement is reinforced by House's sound decision to set the play in a kitchen. The ritual of eating foods from home allows readers and audience members to feel one part of an Appalachian tradition, from which the characters are set apart.

In the essay, "The Story of a Story," House states, "I believe that this is also very much America's story, too, when you come right down to it, for we are all people with dislocation in our DNA." The author first knew about the "hurting part of Christmas" after his uncle Jack Hoskins was murdered while playing cards. "In that time my family hardened, deflated, hollowed," House writes. His family of storytellers either quit telling stories or changed how they were told. He knew his family was beginning to heal when they started telling stories again about his uncle, helping House learn about the healing power of words and stories.

The Hurting Part: Evolution of an American Play concludes with Jason Howard's interview of House, with thoughts on music, experiences with the film industry, activism, and writing.

The interview, House's finely honed essay, the original short story, and the play script make *The Hurting Part: Evolution of an American Play* a unique and classic collection that belongs on the bookshelf of writers, teachers of writing, and avid readers. It is like finding a ruby while walking down a country path. ❖

Trish Ayers is a published essayist and award-winning poet and playwright whose plays have toured the U.S. and Japan.



Birds in the Tops of Winter Trees

by Ron Houchin

Wind Publications
Nicholasville, Kentucky, 2008
$15.00 (paperback), 74 pages

From the steel-grey cover and the title of poet Ron Houchin's new collection, *Birds in the Tops of Winter Trees*, you know the poems inside will be lonesome and elegiac, set in the cold rough months of a world in which "time has worn the gloss off" and everything has been stripped down to its skeletal core. What's left is the spirit of things both dead and dormant, as observed through the weary, patient eye of a poet whose life, too, he knows, is on the wane. In these poems, beds are practice coffins, eyes are frozen ponds, and the earth is a grave underfoot, but Houchin's haunted world is not without moments of life and light.

The poet's perspective on mortality offers shifting images of late middle age. In "The New House," he claims that "as to an old face, daylight / is not kind to an old house." His tone is measured, neither celebratory nor mournful, as he details the ghosts and cobwebs in the eaves and windows of a house where a man can properly prepare for, and become familiar with, death. And yet his domestic imagery also amuses. "An aging man is all furniture," he writes in "The Evening Sky in October," likening a wrinkling brow to "a curtain before a living room window" and white hair to a couch cushion. If the man is a fixture, useful and dumb, the sky in this late autumn scene is made of pink bacon strips, a reminder of the day's sustaining pleasures.

In Houchin's world, even furniture can be a gateway to enlightenment, as he details in "Meditation on a Couch." In this poem, a raggedy sleeper sofa obtained by accident is infused with its own spirit, containing "an unborn dreamer" and offering respite from a swirling mind:

> I love it for its support. Especially when I've
> forgotten the universe and fallen over at one or
> two ante meridiem, not knowing planet or
> house or bed.
>
> In the dream I have on it most often,
> I am folded there in half-lotus position, drifting
> calmly like hands in the lap of the river.

Houchin's search for truth takes him through scenes domestic and wild, both of which are tendered in "Undersides." The poet looked for answers in his youth: "My girlfriend had see-through skin. / I could count her every vein. I thought / that was real, meant she was honest." A youth spent digging for truth in mystery and romance gives way to a mature eye that sees the honesty of every surface, beautiful and ugly alike, with the hidden and secret no more valuable than the gleaming clean.

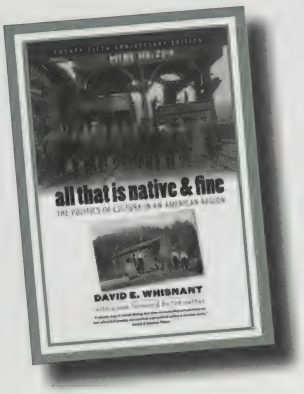
Those surfaces blend in "Packing to Leave the Planet," as the need to capture the grandeur of the world's wonders fades when death approaches. Rather than loading a crypt with household objects—no couch needed to meditate on in the spirit world—the poet attempts to catalog constellations and number Stonehenge stones "for easy reassembly," but his efforts are in vain. How much of this life can we hope to take away? Houchin's poems don't offer easy answers.

Maybe instead the question is, "What can we leave behind?" In "The World When I'm Not There," the poet holds his own absence responsible for others' bad decisions. His solution: to write his way into as many households as possible, offering books as slanted luck charms, serving up poems as preventive medicine for the certain ills of life. ❖

Erin Keane of Louisville, Kentucky, is the author of a collection of poems, *The Gravity Soundtrack* (WordFarm 2007), and is a frequent reviewer for *Now & Then*.

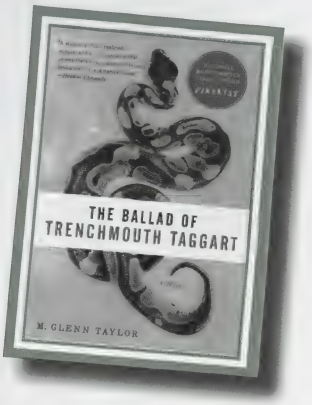
BOOKS IN BRIEF

MARIANNE WORTHINGTON



All That Is Native & Fine:
The Politics of Culture in an American Region
by David E. Whisnant (University of North Carolina Press, 2009)

Whisnant's classic text on the cultural invention of Appalachia will find a new audience in this twenty-fifth anniversary edition. In a new foreword, Whisnant recalls how and why he wrote the book and how some of its central concerns have informed his other work in comparing and contrasting Appalachia's cultural myths with its cultural history. ❖

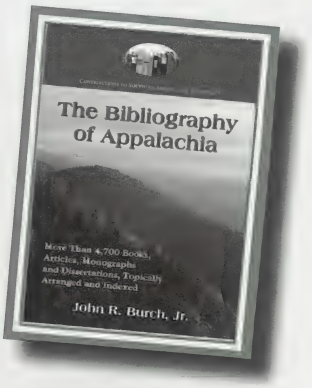


The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart
by M. Glenn Taylor (Vandalia Press, 2008)

Taylor's novel is a compelling mix of fact and fantasy centered on the long life of the central character—the colorful West Virginian, Trenchmouth Taggart. Described by one reviewer as "picaresque, legendary, epic, and outrageous," this debut novel will entertain and astound readers. ❖

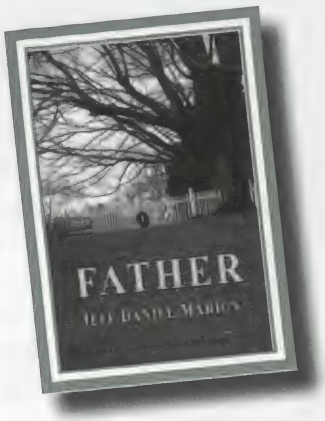
Beech Mountain Man:
The Memoirs of Ronda Lee Hicks
by Thomas Burton (University of Tennessee Press, 2009)

Ronda Lee Hicks (cousin to the late famed storyteller Ray Hicks) speaks of his own lively, rough, and unusual life as a resident of Beech Mountain, North Carolina. Burton's careful transcriptions, notes, and editing of this oral history make for an engaging exploration of the life and times of a multi-faceted Appalachian man. ❖



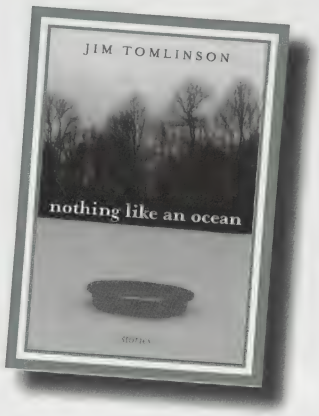
The Bibliography of Appalachia
compiled by John R. Burch, Jr. (McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008)

This selected bibliography by librarian John Burch is a fine sourcebook for teachers, students, and general readers who want to do further research or reading in the field of Appalachian life and culture. Divided into twenty-four subject areas, the bibliography contains over 4,700 entries. ❖



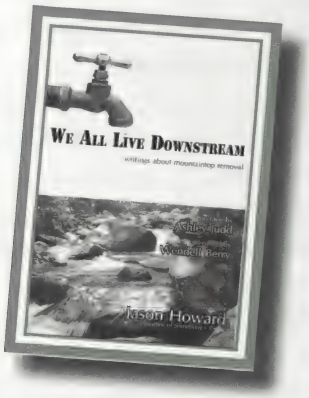
Father
by Jeff Daniel Marion (Wind Publications, 2009)

Marion's eighth collection of poems is a culmination of previous work devoted to his relationship with his father. Readers familiar with Marion may know some of these poems from previous collections, but the great gift is having all these "father" poems lovingly arranged and presented in one volume. ❖



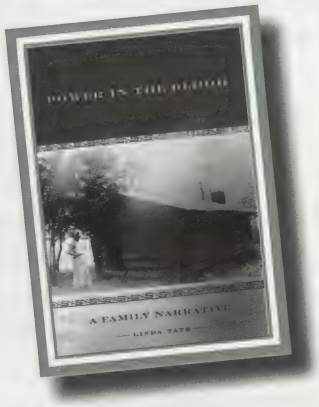
Nothing like an Ocean: Stories by Jim Tomlinson
(University Press of Kentucky, 2009)

Fiction writer Jim Tomlinson revisits Spivey, Kentucky, in this second collection of short stories. Winner of the prestigious Iowa Short Fiction Award in 2006 for his debut collection *Things Kept, Things Left Behind*, Tomlinson presents his complex, rural characters in a characteristically convincing and evocative style. ❖



We All Live Downstream:
Writings about Mountaintop Removal
edited by Jason Howard (MotesBooks, 2009)

This multi-genre anthology features work from young writers and noted authors on the gripping subject of mountaintop removal coal mining and its devastating effects on coalfield residents. The book includes writings by Denise Giardina, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Erik Reece, Ann Pancake, Silas House, Maurice Manning, Joyce Dyer, Terry Tempest Williams, and Jean Ritchie, among eighty other writers and activists. ❖



Power in the Blood: A Family Narrative
by Linda Tate (Ohio University Press, 2009)

Early in this carefully researched story of the author's Cherokee-Appalachian family, Linda Tate writes: "All my life, I'd avoided thinking about the things that had gone wrong in my family. Now I looked back across time and saw the unsettling truth." The result of Tate's search is a powerful family history, written in dramatic and appealing prose. ❖

STARK LOVE: A SILENT MASTERPIECE

BRAD LIFFORD

This is a story about a film that, by most contemporary measures of success, would be considered a failure. The actors were unknowns when they were cast, and they faded back into anonymity not long after the initial premiere. The box office gross fell far short of expectations.

Paramount Pictures owns the rights to the film and has never deemed the movie worth releasing on videotape, much less DVD. What's more, many reading this article will not have heard of *Stark Love*—and most will surely not have seen it.

Yet *Stark Love* is anything but a failure. It is a masterpiece—a feature film from the silent age that is a powerful and moving story about the people of the Appalachian Mountains. Filmed on location near Robbinsville, in western North Carolina, *Stark Love* features Appalachian people who were not trained actors (although a viewer would never know they were amateurs). The film illustrates a way of life that has all but disappeared.

For years, *Stark Love* was considered a "lost film." In the late 1960s, the film was rediscovered by a British film historian in, of all places, the Czechoslovakian Film Archive in Prague. Working prints are so rare they are zealously guarded, and screenings are almost unheard of. Thus, it was cause for celebration on October 22, 2009, when *Stark Love* was shown at the Paramount Center for the Arts in Bristol, Tennessee. The Paramount, a stately theater built in 1930, served as the ideal venue for an Appalachian silent film, with organist Rex Ward providing accompaniment on the Paramount's Mighty Wurlitzer organ.

Makers of the film *Lost Masterpiece: Karl Brown's "Stark Love"* screened their documentary after the feature presentation. Dr. John White, an Atlanta writer and co-producer of the documentary, invited several family members of the original *Stark Love* cast to see the movie.

The celebration was also a wistful one for serious silent film enthusiasts like Bradley Reeves, because he knows that each time he sees *Stark Love* could also be his last.

"It's of one my favorite films, but it's also like the greatest film that no one has seen," Reeves laments.

Reeves is more than a film fan; he's a master projectionist with the Tennessee Archive of Moving Picture and Sound in Knoxville. It was Reeves who was entrusted by New York's Museum of Modern Art to safeguard the print of *Stark Love* that MOMA loaned for the screening at the Paramount.

Just as the title suggests, *Stark Love* is, indeed, a love story. Director Karl Brown, who made his bones in Hollywood as an assistant to D.W. Griffith, wanted to craft a film about the rural Southern Appalachian mountains, on location, using local residents for the cast. He convinced Paramount to bankroll his vision. He found the perfect location in the remote Unicoi Mountains of North Carolina.

The film centers on star-crossed lovers. Teenagers Barbara Allen and Rob Warwick live, as publicity

Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation poster for Stark Love. *Photo courtesy John White.*

trumpeted, in the "wild Kentucky mountains," each dealing with handed-down circumstances that leave them unfulfilled.

Barbara is little more than a servant to her family. Rob is eternally dissatisfied, brooding over books and longing for an education. He has eyes for Barbara and would like to see her get an education, too. But it becomes apparent that Rob's father also has designs on the young girl, who is attractive and a fine housekeeper.

Brown's plan to find his cast among "mountain people" had two notable exceptions. The filmmaker found his 'Barbara' in Knoxville, and the sixteen-year-old Helen Mundy did have some song and dance experience. Forrest James, as 'Rob,' wasn't a local mountain resident either, but rather, a student at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University).

Both actors are remarkably good in *Stark Love*. James was blessed with the handsomeness and physical presence of a leading man, and clearly possessed the instincts of a natural actor. For her part, Mundy, with the captivating eyes and golden beauty of a Hollywood starlet, had such a spunky bearing that she dominates the screen.

Both Mundy and James might have become Hollywood stars were it not for the fact that it was the only movie credit for both. James looked at a career in films with disdain. He later built a career as a successful businessman.

"He was actually offered a five-year [film] contract," White says, "but his mother did not want him to be in movies. He very dutifully came back to Auburn and finished college."

Mundy was more taken with thoughts of a film career, and Paramount did see her as a budding star. Apparently, though, she didn't have the temperament for it.

"She was too hot-headed and strong-willed," Reeves says.

Before she could make another movie, Mundy left the Hollywood life and went to Michigan, where she married a band leader and lived a long life—albeit one outside of film.

Stark Love, which was released in February of 1927, was hailed by critics but did not attract audiences. The box office gross was only $150,000, White notes.

White had never heard of *Stark Love* until he and a close friend, Cal James, were horseback riding one day. They took a break and began discussing movies. James asked him: "Did you know my father was in a silent film called *Stark Love*?" James had never even seen the movie.

White made it his mission to find the film. When his pilgrimage to see *Stark Love* finally ended at the University of Wisconsin, he realized how good the movie was and learned that his friend Cal was not the only descendant of the cast who might never see it. He began tracking down relatives of the cast members, and his documentary is told through their eyes.

White hopes that when he and his colleagues, Craig Tollis and Elisabeth Andre, complete the documentary, Paramount might release it on DVD along with *Stark Love*.

"Cal told me about an experience he had when he was at Georgia Tech," White says. "A professor came to the 'Cal James' name when he was calling roll, and after class he walked up to Cal and said, 'Are you Forrest James' son?'"

James said that he was.

"The professor says, 'Your father was in the silent film *Stark Love*, and that's the greatest movie that was ever made.'" ❖

Brad Lifford is media relations coordinator for the Division of Health Sciences at East Tennessee State University.

Helen Mundy and Forrest James in a movie still from Stark Love. *Photo courtesy John White.*

A HOT DOG ODYSSEY ON LEE HIGHWAY

BRAD LIFFORD

Can a hot dog possibly be spiritual? If there is an apotheosis for hot dog stands, then who's to say hot dogs can't reach sacred heights? The short film *Red Hot Dog Digest* certainly gives red weenies exalted treatment.

If you grew up in northeast Tennessee or southwest Virginia, chances are you could add a personal chapter to *Red Hot Dog Digest*. Mine: eating fourteen Valleydale wieners charred over a gasoline-fueled campfire where neighbors had gathered together on a vacant dirt lot to pass the evening. Fourteen hot dogs blackened on a coat hanger—no bun involved. I was nine years old, and I thought hot dogs that were not red were defective.

I had long since turned my back on red hot dogs, only buying them for our daughter. Now she'll have to fight me for them. Produced by ETSU, *Red Hot Dog Digest* is an appetizing hot dog odyssey that has the added benefit of archival Valleydale commercial footage, those TV spots from the 1960s and '70s that featured porkers unwittingly singing "Hooray for Valleydale."

This is an ode to the red dog and the roadside diners and hot dog huts strung along Virginia's Lee Highway between Christiansburg and Bristol that would think of serving nothing else.

Blake Griffith, co-owner of Dude's Drive-In in Christiansburg, admits to a brief flight of misguided fancy: "We once tried to get rid of the red hot dog." His verb tense tells you the decision didn't take. Dude's still serves the red hot dog. So do fellow Virginia haunts like the Corner Dog House in Bristol and Skeeter's in Wytheville. Says Skeeter's owner Rick Patton, "With the red weenie, we would never change that hot dog because if we did change it, it would terminate Skeeter's."

And then there is the Hi-Way Drive-In, better known as the Dip Dog Stand, in Marion. The filmmakers plainly state that the Dip Dog is the apotheosis of red hot dog dining. Literally dipped during preparation, a Dip Dog is a red dog that comes out looking like a corndog but is not. There's a special batter involved, and the dog is finally mustarded before being served. At the Dip Dog, mustard is a verb.

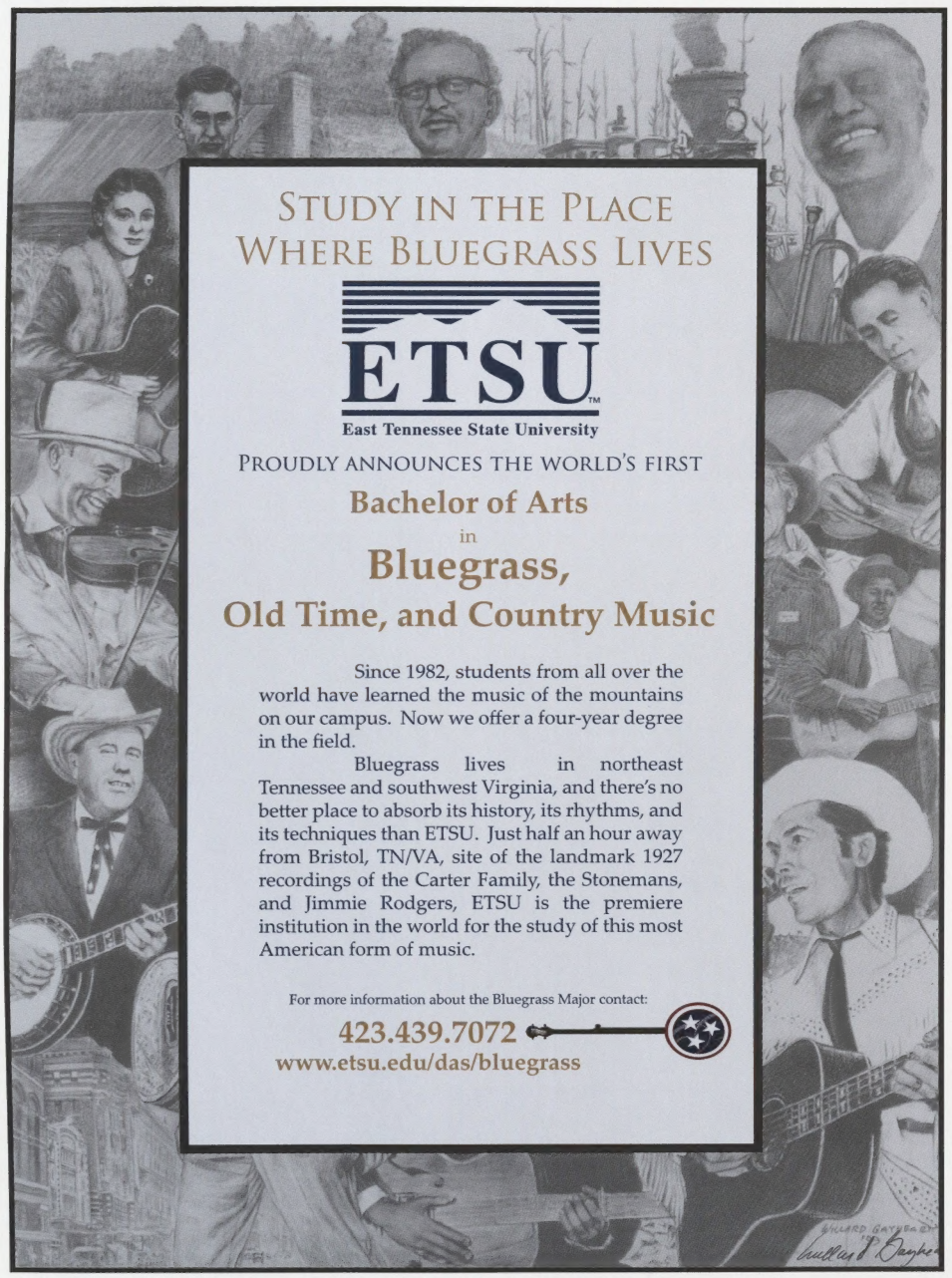
I was taken with the food in *Red Hot Dog Digest*, but the people are the most captivating part of this film. Owners who talk about their establishments have an earnest, heartfelt sense that there's more to what they do than just satisfying appetites. All are people you would want to know, to spend more time with.

Red Hot Dog Digest was served perfectly, other than the fact that the odyssey ended too soon. I wanted more. ❖

Brad Lifford is media relations coordinator for the Division of Health Sciences at East Tennessee State University.

SIGNING OFF

The spirit of Appalachian music lives at East Tennessee State University. Recently, our sister unit in the newly-created Department of Appalachian Studies announced the world's first bluegrass major.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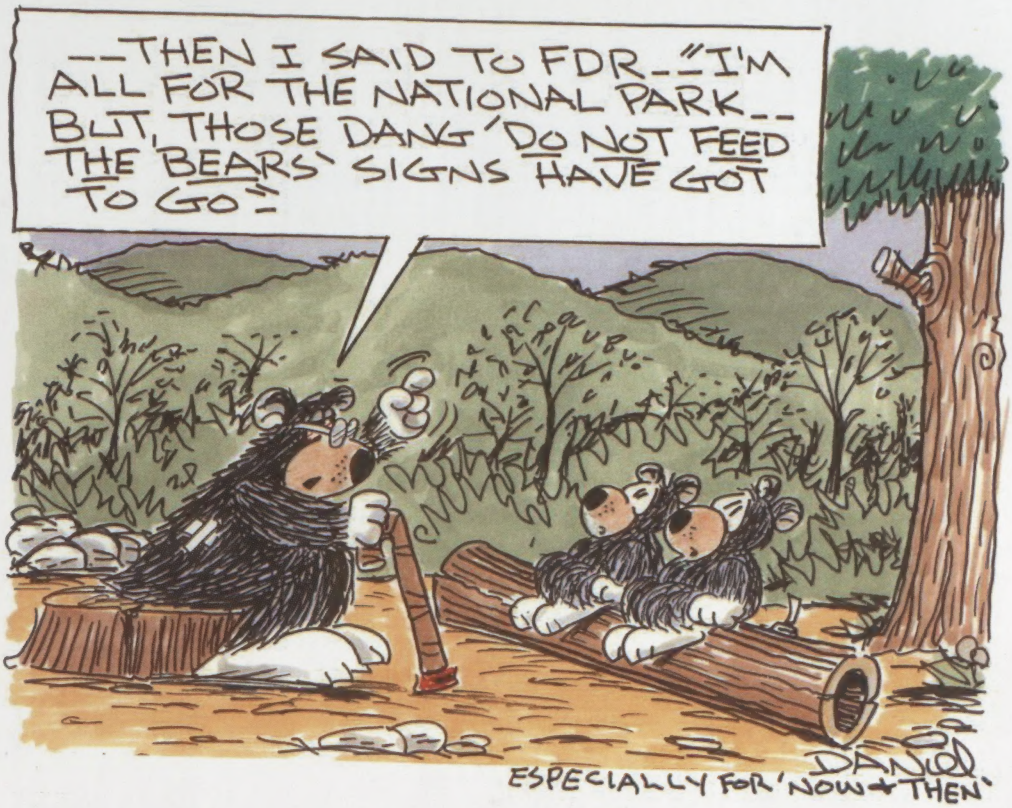
--THEN I SAID TO FDR--"I'M ALL FOR THE NATIONAL PARK-- BUT, THOSE DANG 'DO NOT FEED THE BEARS' SIGNS HAVE GOT TO GO"
ESPECIALLY FOR 'NOW & THEN'
DANIEL

As we close our twenty-fifth anniversary celebration with this issue, Charles Daniel's cartoon reminds us of another important anniversary that took place in 2009. Established in 1934, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the largest national park east of the Rockies, and the most visited national park in the United States.

Cartoon created especially for *Now & Then* courtesy Charles Daniel, *Knoxville News Sentinel.*

NOW & THEN

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